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DANDY DICK'S DRAGNET.

BY ROBERT RANDOLPH INMAN.



GREAT FLAMING FLAG-LIKE POSTERS WERE UNFURLED TO THE MORNING BREEZE. THE STRANGER WAS SHOWING HIS COLORS.

Dandy Dick's Dragnet;

OR,

Seining the Invisible Six.

BY ROBERT R. INMAN,
AUTHOR OF THE "DANDY DICK" NOVELS.

CHAPTER I.

IMPERIAL CITY MYSTIFIED.

RUMORS of foul play were abroad. It was believed that Detective Dick Darrel had been secretly killed.

Further, it was suspected that he had met his fate at the hands of that mysterious band—the Invisible Seven.

How he had been killed—or perchance captured, however, was the most puzzling part of all. No one could offer any theory that would hold weight.

It was well known that Dandy Dick had been the sworn foe of the mysterious Invisible Seven, and it was thought that they must have laid a trap for him and his allies and had done away with them all.

But, how, no man could say.

Dick Darrel had just brought a desperate case to a successful close.

His former servant and companion, Barney O'Linn, had been cruelly poisoned at Imperial City—then called "Nip-n-Tuck," and Dick had hunted down his murderer.

To the amazement and indignation of the people of Imperial, he proved that the marshal of the camp, one Doctor Conrad, a man high in local favor, was the one who had done the dastardly deed.

By a scheme in which was displayed the keenest cunning, Dandy Dick brought proof to bear against the doctor and made the arrest, and, after a hearing at Imperial City, sent him away in the custody of men whom the detective had called to his assistance.

These men took the prisoner away by the stage, and when the stage had gone, Dick and his two allies entered the hotel.

They were not seen from that hour, not one of them!

What had become of them?

As they did not reappear, inquiry began to be made, and they were searched for earnestly.

They were not found, nor any trace of them. No one about the hotel had seen them, and nothing whatever was to be learned concerning them.

Next, a visit was made to the cabin Dick had occupied, but they were not there, and everything pointed in the direction of foul play. That they had secretly departed of their own accord was not believed by any one.

And all the circumstances were against it, too.

Things at the cabin showed evidence of unintentional absence.

When they could not be found at the hotel nor at the cabin, by the friends who sought them, then the alarm was given.

A general search was made all over the camp, but nothing was to be learned of their whereabouts. No one had seen them, and their disappearance was utter and unaccountable.

No men were more earnest in their search than the leading citizens of the place, such as George Pierre, Lawyer Corker, Baldwin Bloome, Sinclair Fowley and others, but their careful search availed nothing.

Ham Stanton expressed himself forcibly and to the point.

"Et ar' that Invisible Seven what's done et!" he cried. "Though how they could git away with a wide-awake feller like Dick Darrel, is more'n I kin see."

"An' without his makin' a fuss about et, so's somebody would know et," added ex-Marshal Simon Slow.

"That's what I mean," averred Ham. "An' et wasn't only Dick, but his detective pard an' ther Chinee."

"They must have gone away of their own free will," thought Sinclair Fowley.

"I know better'n that," protested Ham. "Darrel wasn't that sort, he wasn't; he wouldn't go off 'thout speakin' good-by to his friends. 'Sides, ef they had, somebody would'a seen 'em, an' some 'scuse would'a b'en given fer the'r goin'."

"That last point is the clincher," declared the lawyer. "They couldn't have got away without being seen, that's sure."

"Then, where are they?"

That was a question that brought them around to the starting-point again, and nothing was settled.

Finally, another and more thorough search was made in and about the hotel.

There was proof enough that they had entered there, immediately after the departure of the stage, but no man had seen them since.

It had come out that there was no one in the bar-room at the moment, the bartender being out on the piazza to see the prisoner off, but he had returned a moment later.

When he came in, however, no one was in the bar-room, and having seen Darrel, his friend and the Chinaman go in, he supposed they had passed through to the rear. He gave it no further thought at the time, and forgot all about it till the inquiry began to be made.

The second search was thorough, as said.

Every room was visited, and searched, too, whether occupied or not, but all without avail.

Imperial City was greatly puzzled, and great was the excitement during the day or two immediately following.

But, nothing was learned, and at the end of a week it was as much a mystery as it had been at first. Nothing whatever had been discovered.

During that week some important local matters had been adjusted, principal among which was the election of George Pierre, or Gold-plate George, to the office of marshal.

This was to fill the unexpired term of Doctor Conrad, and as the doctor had been in office only a short time, it was no small honor, as the citizens looked upon it. And perhaps Gold-plate held the same view of it.

After the election, the new marshal made a proclamation, denouncing the Invisible Seven, and offering a reward for their arrest.

He spoke, too, of the mysterious disappearance of Dandy Dick, and offered further reward for information concerning him, all of which the good people of Imperial heartily approved.

And so stood matters at the time of our story.

CHAPTER II.

THE INVISIBLE SEVEN IN CONCLAVE.

A DEEP, woody glade, where the darkness was utterly impenetrable—a place where intense shadows made it semi-dark even at noon tide, and where gigantic boulders abounded.

There was an overhanging cliff, could it have been seen, with shelves along its face at different heights, and at its base a pool of water, before which was the glade.

It was a spot little frequented by day, and by night it was about the last place a sane man would think of visiting without some urgent business to call him there; and that any man could have business there did not seem within the range of the probable.

And yet, night as it was, and late the hour, men were approaching that very locality—several of them, unseen and silent, singly and in pairs, and they felt their way into the glade with cautious tread.

Finally no more steps were heard, and one spoke.

"Are all here?" was hoarsely whispered.

For answer, each of the others spoke a number, the numbers two, four, five, six and seven.

"And I am Number Three," spoke the first, again. "We are all here, since we are no longer seven, but six. You have no leader."

Another spoke.

"We want you for our captain."

"Don't you think some one else of our number can give you better service?"

"No; we want you," was the response. "We have made up our minds on that point already."

"Well, how many are in favor?"

"All of us."

There was no dissenting voice.

"That being your wish, I accept the office, and take my number—Number One. Henceforth we are the Invisible Six. Number Two will retain his number; the others must drop a unit each, making six the highest."

"We understand."

"Very good. Now, as our former leader said in accepting the office you have given me, I must be obeyed. No man must know of us, and our operations must be so secret that they can never be traced home. As we meet now in darkness—invisible, so must we continue."

"Be it so."

"Now, that settled, we have a more important matter to discuss."

"The disappearance of that accursed Dick Darrel!"

"Exactly. Men say that the Invisibles have

disposed of him, but we know better. It is as great a mystery to us as to any one else."

"Yes; curse it! And the more we think of it the worse it becomes. What in wonders became of Dick Darrel, the Chinaman, and the other, after they entered the bar-room?"

"We have tried hard to answer that question, and failed. Had they vanished in air, they could not have disappeared more suddenly and completely. They did not pass through to the rear, for they would have been seen. Nor did they again come out the way they went in. It beats all that I ever met with yet."

"What is going to be done about it?"

"That is what we are here to settle," spoke the leader. "We have reason to believe, from what we know of Dandy Dick, that he is still in these parts, probably with the intention of hunting us down to the death. So we are bound to hear from him again, is my opinion."

"Well; and what then?"

"He will come to Imperial City in disguise, when he comes, of course, and no telling what his disguise will be. A man who can be an Italian organ-grinder one day and an Indian the next, and pass such an examination as he did in both characters without detection, is capable of anything."

"You are right in that."

"So, no matter how he comes, we must make sure of him. If a stranger comes to town, no matter whether in the garb of saint or devil, he must be suspected and put out of the way if the least suspicion holds. We will kill half a dozen, if need be, till we get the right one. That is the only way to do it, the only sure way, for we know we can't trust our eyes to unmask him."

"There are strangers at Imperial now," spoke one.

"None whom we haven't sifted," reminded the leader. "The Gobles at the hotel we know all about, and the few others are not to be suspected, since no amount of disguise could transform Dandy Dick to such as they. The Gobles, you know, came there before Darrel disappeared, and we saw them and Darrel and his pards at the same time too often to suspect. Besides, they were found in their room after Darrel was missed. No; Dick Darrel is not there yet."

"But when he does come—"

"When he does appear on the scene, death to him! Death to any man upon whom suspicion may fall!"

Taking oath anew, the Invisible Six moved off in the darkness as silently as they had come.

CHAPTER III.

THE SECRET REVEALED.

IT was on that same night, and not far from the same hour, when Ham Stanton, in his cabin at Imperial City, was awakened by a persistent tapping at his window.

He heard it long before he was wide enough awake to realize what it was, but finally it came to him and he sprung up in his bunk with a start. All was darkness in the cabin, and there was no sound save the constant tapping.

Getting up silently, he approached the window and took a sidewise glance out into the lesser darkness.

As he looked, he made out the figure of a hand close to the glass, the fingers beating a tattoo upon the pane.

The sound was not loud, but it was clear and continuous, and was well calculated to awaken the soundest of sleepers.

"Waal, who is that?" Ham suddenly demanded.

The hand was removed instantly, and a face took its place.

"A friend, Ham Stanton," was the response, in clear, low tone.

"An' what d'ye want?"

"To talk with you."

"Yer wants ter come in?"

"Yes; I want to come in."

"Waal, now, I don't let folks in at this hyar hour, unless I knows who an' what they is. Who be you, stranger?"

"I'm no stranger to you, Ham," was the answer to that, in the same low, clear tone.

"I'm Dick Darrel."

"What! What's that yer say?"

"Dick Darrel, at your service. Will you open to me?"

"Sart'in, I'll let yer in, but mind yer don't try no fool work on with me. If you ain't Dick Darrel, the worse for you."

The face was removed from the pane, and a moment later a step was heard at the door.

Ham got into his clothes with some haste, and when he had secured his belt and looked to his weapons, he opened the door.

"I've got ther drop on yer," he informed, the moment the door swung back. "I ain't ter be fooled with. Step right in, if yer is all wool ther same as yer claims ter be."

There was no hesitation about accepting the invitation.

"Your precautions are all right, and I have no fault to find with them," the visitor remarked.

Ham closed the door, and demanded:

"Has yer got a match about yer clothes?"

"Yes," the answer. "a pocket safe full."

"Waal, jest strike one, an' let me have a squint at yer phiz."

"I'll do that, certainly, for I want you to be assured regarding my identity, old friend."

There was a moment's pause; then followed the scraping of a match.

Soon the little blue flame sprung up, and, as soon as it blazed white, the visitor held it before his face.

"Dick Darrel, b'gosh!" cried Ham. "Guv us yer paw!"

The light was extinguished at once.

"You mustn't speak so loud," Dick cautioned—for he it was.

"It kem out itself," declared Ham. "I'll be a little more keerful. But, say, Dick—"

"Well, what is it?"

"Whar did ye go to when yo went inter ther bar-room t'other day and wasn't seen no more? I'm dyin' ter know what bekem of yer, an so's everybody else."

Dandy Dick laughed lightly.

"So, you are dying to know, are you?" he remarked.

"Yas; an' fur ther luv o' goodness tell me. How did yer do et, anyhow?"

Dick explained in few words, and Ham exclaimed:

"Waal, I'll ber darn!"

"You didn't suspect it, then?"

"Suspect it! How could a feller suspect?"

"Well, that's so; I made a long play, and it seems I got there."

"Bet yer life yer did! You is ther devil himself at detective business, an' that's ther fact. You comes hyar as a Eyetalian, with a organ an' a monkey, an' yer fooled every man of us, an' got at yer enemy in fine style. Then, right on top o' that ye comes up as an Injun, an' bags yer man ergain. An' now, darn me if hyar ye ain't a third time, an'—"

"And as well disguised as before, eh? Well, I hope so, for I have a desperate game to play, and I want your help in it. It is for that I have come here to-night. Will you help me?"

"Will I? Bet yer life I will!"

"I thought I could depend on you, and I was not mistaken."

"Bet yer boots on that, every time! But, what is yer after now? What has yer got yer eye on?"

"The Invisibles."

"I thort so, b'gosh! I'm with yer, heart an' soul."

"That is enough for the present. My plans are not laid yet. But, you must guard against betraying me, Ham."

"Yer kin trust me fer that, pard."

"I know I may, so far as your intention is concerned, but you must be on your guard all the time. A look, or even a slighter thing, might expose all."

"I tell ye yer kin trust me. Yer secret is safe— Blazes! who would 'a' believed it!"

"It was a clever trick, I think, myself."

"Why didn't ye let me onto it afore?"

"I have been waiting for a favorable opportunity. To-night the Invisibles are abroad, and I took advantage of the moment."

"Yas; I begin ter see. Waal, all yer has ter do is ter direct me, an' I'll git thar, you bet!"

"Very well. Of course you can understand that my communications with you must be extremely cautious. The least thing might betray me, so be prepared to hear from me at any moment and in any unlooked-for manner."

"I understand."

"It may be to-morrow; it may be a week hence."

"All ther same. Count on me as bein' ready when yer wants me, that's all."

"I'm going to prepare a dragnet for them this time, Ham, so to call it, and I want to scoop them all at one haul."

"That's ther cheesel! An' yer wants ter put a few nooses onto et, too, an' make one clean job of et. Hang 'em at ther same time as yer hauls 'em."

"They shall have what they deserve, never fear!"

"I don't doubt it, pard, with you after 'em."

"Now I'll go. The hour is late, and I mustn't risk discovery. Mind, keep well the secret I have intrusted to your keeping."

Ham promised yet again, and Detective Dick Darrel took his leave, disappearing in the dense darkness of the night, while Ham closed the door after him and returned to his bunk.

CHAPTER IV.

MESSAGES FROM THE MISSING.

MENTION in a casual way has been made of "the Gobles."

The persons bearing that name were guests at the United States Hotel, at Imperial City.

They had arrived there a few days previous to the disappearance of Dandy Dick and his companions, as has been shown.

The party consisted of a man and his wife, with a Chinese servant whom they called Tom Lee. They had registered as from San Francisco, and evidently rich.

Gideon Gobles was a man about fifty years of age, apparently, and, although he claimed to be from San Francisco, had more the appearance of a countryman, a retired farmer, well-to-do.

His wife, Liannah, was a rather masculine appearing woman, yet a motherly-looking personage withal, who "looked up to" her husband in all things, evidently having full confidence in him and in his opinions and judgment.

The Chinese servant was a Chinaman of the usual type, clad in ill-fitting and odd-enough American garments, with his *queue* coiled up under his black felt hat after the manner peculiar to his semi-Americanized countrymen in general—a "John" of the familiar type.

And these had come to the hotel, as stated, previous to the disappearance of Dick Darrel and his allies.

Mr. Gobles was searching for a truant son—a prodigal son, so to say.

The young man had left home about a year before, with a full pocket, and had not been heard from since.

The young gentleman had played the prodigal act several times before, leaving home with a full purse, and returning in about three months "dead broke."

Now, however, his stay was so prolonged that the old folks, becoming uneasy, had begun search for him, and such slight information as they had been able to gather had led them in the direction of Imperial City.

Gideon had questioned almost every man in the camp concerning the lost heir, trying to get some further clew to his whereabouts, but so far all in vain. No one had seen anything of a young man answering to the description the father gave of his son.

Simeon Gobles, the name of the missing young man, was described as a fair and slight young fellow about twenty-two years old. He had red hair, an incipient mustache, and, according to statement, a goodly array of freckles. And he was an unfortunate in that he was blind in one eye and had a cross in the other.

Such a description could not be mistaken, and should Simeon Gobles chance to come within a dozen miles of Imperial City he would be sure to be "run in." There would be little chance of mistaking his identity, for the description was so plain that even he who ran might read. And besides, the fond father of the misguided prodigal had posted a reward of a hundred dollars for any correct information.

It was on the morning following the night of the events recorded in the preceding chapters, that Mr. and Mrs. Gobles, just coming out from breakfast, met Sinclair Fowley on the piazza.

"Good-morning, Mr. Gobles!" the mine-manager greeted; "good-morning, Mrs. Gobles."

"Good-morning, Mr. Fowley!" was the response from both.

"Any word of the lost one yet?" Fowley inquired.

"Not a word, sir," responded Gobles. And Mrs. Gobles echoed:

"Not a word."

"It is strange."

"We begin to think we must have been misled, sir."

"It looks like it, and that's a fact," Fowley assented. "It is plain that your son has never been here."

"We agree with you," spoke Mrs. Gobles. "If any one here had seen our dear Simeon, I am sure he would be remembered. Simeon has a striking presence, sir."

"So I am led to infer, from his description. I am sure if any one ever saw him he would remember him. What do you think of doing, Mr. Gobles? Will you still remain here for a time?"

"Yes; I think we will remain a little longer," was the answer. "You see, sir, we may as well stop here as any place, and we can send out letters of description and inquiry, and in truth have done so, and any one can write us here."

"Not a bad idea."

"So we think. It is better than being on the constant move."

"I agree with you, perfectly. Well, I hope you will get tidings of the lost one, soon."

Mr. Fowley passed on, while Mr. and Mrs. Gobles, arm in arm, walked up and down the piazza, taking their morning constitutional.

They were an odd-looking couple. They were clad in their best, in garments thirty years out of style, and which had probably been their wedding clothes. If so, they had kept them well.

Mr. Gobles had on an old-style high hat, broad at the top and wide at the rim, and the collar of his coat was so high in the back that it and the hat occasionally met and kissed. And the sleeves of the coat were narrow and long.

He wore an old-style stock or cravat, had a gorgeously patterned vest, and breeches that buttoned up before like a curtain on a wagon. He had on spectacles, too, that might have belonged to his grandfather, and taken all in all, he was a fine old gentleman of the real old sort.

His wife was dressed to correspond, being finished off with a white cap and a pair of green glasses.

They were a quaint pair, and the roughest rough in the place would not have offered them insult or injury, so gentle and innocent they appeared to be.

Talking together as they paced up and down the short and narrow piazza, they gave little attention to what was going on about them, but responded now and again to morning greetings from persons passing.

Finally Ham Stanton came along.

"Waal, any word o' that 'ar missin' youngster yet, Mister Gobles?" he asked.

"Not a word, good friend," was the response. "We are beginning to fear the worst has happened."

"Hanged on account of hosses, eh? Waal, that would be rough, I allow. That is genly ther wu'st that kin happen, in these days."

"Heavens!" gasped Mrs. Gobles, "you don't think they have hanged my boy, do you, sir? Oh, do not tell me you think such a thing as that of my poor Simeon!"

"Waal, now, ma'm, it was yer husband what said he thort ther wu'st had happened, an' I opine that's ther wu'st, ain't it? But, mebby that wasn't jest what you was meanin', Mister Gobles."

"I meant to say we fear he is dead," sighed Gideon.

"Oh, that makes a difference. I beg yer parding, ma'm. There's a difference 'tween dyin' an' bein' hanged."

"I know they would never hang my boy," declared the mother of the prodigal. "One look at his face would assure them of his innocence."

"Haven't no doubt of it, ma'm, not ther least, from his descrip. But, it begins ter look as if he wasn't in these parts. That reward would fetch him, if he was, I think."

"I would willingly double the reward, if I thought it would hasten his discovery," Gideon declared.

"I don't think it's any use ter raise it," said Ham. "I remember that's all Goody Crawl offered when his dog was stole, an' it fetched the cur home."

While they were talking, the mayor or marshal of the city, Gold-plate George, came out of the hotel in a rather excited manner, bearing a large envelope in his hand, and looked about him.

"Hello, Ham," he greeted, at sight of that worthy; "see here, I want to show you something."

"What are it, Gold-plate?" Ham asked, curiously, advancing.

"I have heard from Dick Darrel at last."

"Ther dickins yer have!"

"That's the person we have heard so much about, isn't it?" queried Gobles.

"The same, sir. You remember, he disappeared shortly after you came here."

"Yes; I remember him. Was fixed out like an Indian, made an arrest, and then suddenly was not, like Enoch of old."

"Exactly; but Enoch's case don't fit his, for it seems he hasn't gone far; at any rate, here is a communication just fresh from his hands."

"But, what ar' it?" demanded Ham Stanton, impatiently.

"At that moment Sinclair Fowley came

Dandy Dick's Dragnet.

bouncing out upon the piazza, he, too, with a white envelope like that of the marshal's.

"What!" cried the marshal. "You too?"

He held up his own as he spoke.

"I've heard from Dick Darrel," cried the excited Fowley.

"So have I. It seems that he isn't so much dead as we feared. Hello! here comes Goodman Crawley with another!"

Goody Crawl was coming over from his saloon, bearing a similar envelope in hand, and ere he arrived Lawyer Corker, Baldwin Bloome and Rev. Ambrose Bray, were seen coming up the street in company, each similarly armed.

George Pierre, Sinclair Fowley and Goodman Crawley looked at one another in something like blank amazement, and then looked away toward the others who were approaching; while Ham Stanton, with some others who had paused there, looked at them all in wonderment undisguised.

CHAPTER V.

DANDY DICK'S NOTICE.

WHEN Lawyer Corker and his companions came near, they suddenly stopped short.

They had caught sight of the envelopes in the hands of the others, and were clearly surprised.

"I venture to say that we don't bring you any news," spoke Corker, advancing, after a brief moment of delay.

"Not very likely that you do," responded Gold-plate George, "judging by the appearance of the envelopes you bring along."

"We have heard from brave Dick Darrel!"

"Ditto with us. It looks as though he wants it well known that he is still on deck."

"Ay, verily, 'of a truth,'" asserted the Rev. Bray. "He sends me a notice with the request that I read it to my congregation at the first opportunity."

"And mine he wants me to make public by reading it to the people on the public Square," announced the marshal. "He isn't at all modest in his demands, I shall say. But, it's all right."

From the others similar reports were forthcoming, the request having been that the notices be read, posted, and otherwise disposed of, according to the position of the recipient. But, no one found any fault, being apparently too glad to know that the missing man was alive and well.

"But, what ar' ther notices?" demanded Ham Stanton, with a show of impatience in his tone.

"That's what we wants ter know," cried the crowd, quite a number having now congregated to learn what was the excitement.

"I will read the one I have received," said Rev. Bray, drawing a paper from the envelope he had in hand.

He opened it, spread it out with a flourish, and read:

"To REV. MR. BRAY:—

DEAR SIR:—Will you do me the great favor to make the accompanying notice public by reading it before your congregation at the first opportunity?

"Yours truly,

RICHARD PRINCE DARREL."

"And this is the notice," said Bray, continuing:

"TO THE CITIZEN OF IMPERIAL CITY—Greeting:—

I take this means to let you know that I am not dead or even sleeping, but am right to the front. I have detected the band known to you as the Invisible Seven, and am preparing to gather them in. I am laying my dragnet, and shall soon go seining for these So's of Sa an. Be prepared for a surprise when I present them for your inspection. You will probably recognize some familiar faces.

"Yours on the trail,

DANDY DICK DARREL,

"Detective."

"Bully fer Dickey!" cried Ham Stanton. "I hope he gits thar in good style, an' with both feet, too."

"So do I," agreed Lawyer Corker. "Is that notice like yours, Marshal Pierre? Is it the same as yous, Mr. Fowley? And yours, Mr. Crawley?"

"I guess they are all alike," said Fowley.

"But where did they come from?" demanded Baldy Bloome.

"I found mine in my room," said Pierre.

"And mine was in the bar-room," added Fowley.

The others had found theirs similarly near at hand.

"Do yer suppose Darrel war hyar in person last night?" questioned Ham.

"Yes, or the Chinee," responded Corker. "We know they are near us now, and we must be ready to lend Darrel any help he may require. He represents the law, and the law must be upheld."

"You say aright," agreed Gold-plate George.

"Darrel seems bent upon hunting these rascals down, and we must back him up in every way we can."

"An' we'll do it, you bet!" cried Ham Stanton.

"But, he hasn't revealed anything to us," complained Fowley.

"That's so; he keeps in the dark. He might have taken us more into his confidence, I think."

And the others were of the same mind.

"Mebby he thort it best ter take no chances," suggested Ham. "He has ter be mighty keenful, yer knows."

"That's so," agreed the marshal, "and he must know his own business best."

"And what about these notices?" asked Corker. "We will do as he requests us to do with them, of course, eh?"

"Yes, certainly," agreed the marshal. "It is all to our interest to have this band broken up, and if Darrel has got them spotted, why of course he is the man for us to assist."

"Right!" cried Sinclair Fowley. "We'll do with the notices just as he says, and so do our part. I hope he'll succeed."

"But he don't say how he vanished so suddenly out of ther bar-room, do he?" observed one in the crowd.

"Never a word about it," answered Goody Crawl.

"That will all be explained in good time," said Baldy Bloome.

"For a detective of his ability, it was only a simple trick, no doubt," reminded Fowley.

"Right," agreed Marshal Pierre. "But, come, and we will follow the requests that have been made. Darrel shall not have it to say that we did not render him the assistance he required."

The growing crowd was enthusiastic, and eagerly followed Gold-plate off in the direction of the forum.

Gideon Gobles and his wife looked after them for a moment, and resumed their walk on the piazza.

It was evident that they had little interest. They were clearly not in it, to make use of the popular phrase.

When the crowd reached the place of public assembly, the marshal mounted to the seat of honor on the platform and addressed the people.

"Citizens of Imperial City," he said, "it is with pleasure that I am able to announce good news to you. Dick Darrel is alive! Let it be known far and near that the noble detective lives!"

Cheers.

"We have heard from him, though he does not reveal his whereabouts, and he assures us that he is at work in our interest, hunting down that infernal band, the Invisible Seven. What is our plain duty, citizens? It is to aid him in every way we can."

"Right you be!" one fellow shouted.

"Yes; that is our duty, and I trust that every man of you will stand ready to respond if the call is made. We have seen how ably he trapped the wily doctor who imposed upon us for so long, but we cannot suppose that he can take the Invisible Seven single-handed. He will need aid from us."

"An' he'll git et, you bet!"

"That is in the right tone and spirit, my man. Yes; he will get it, for we will back him, to a man. As Lawyer Corker frequently reminds us, the law must be upheld though the heavens fall, or words to that effect; and our duty in a matter of this sort is plainly marked out for us. Dick Darrel is a noble fellow, and this city is going to see him through!"

There was cheering then, and when it had subsided in a measure the marshal read the notice.

By this time the crowd had grown large, and it need not be said that great interest was manifested.

It gave people something to talk about.

After the reading of the notice, Marshal Pierre left the platform and returned to the hotel in company with Sinclair Fowley.

The two were in earnest conversation on the way, and continued after they had entered the bar-room, where they took seats and remained for a considerable time.

Meanwhile, the others who had received the notices had posted them up in conspicuous places, except Reverend Bray, who pocketed his for the purpose of reading it to his congregation as requested.

Men here and there in groups were discussing the matter freely.

That the Invisible Seven had been detected, and that they were men who would probably be

recognized at Imperial City, as Darrel said in his notice, were events of signal import.

Ham Stanton, in company with Simon Slow, had adjourned to the Peach Blow, to give the matter the attention its importance deserved.

"Yes, sir; b'gosh!" exclaimed Ham, as they sat down.

"Then you believe he has spotted 'em, eh?" interrogated Simon.

"Sure as shootin'. You'll see fun afore ye are many days older, Simon."

"An' you think he'll scoop 'em?"

"Sure. But mebby he'll need help; an' if he does—"

"The whole camp is ready to give it to him, that's sartain."

"Yas, 'cordin' to all appear; but that ain't jest the sort o' help ther noble Richard are wantin', I'm thinkin', Simon."

"What do yer mean?"

"I have an idee that he'd ruther have a few of us of ther Old Guard, if it comes to a pinch. I opine he'd call on me an' you about as soon as on any of 'em."

"Might on you; don't know about me."

"Waal, say on me, then; an' if he does, I'll be after some of ther rest of ye, yer kin bet."

Further talk on that line impressed Simon that perhaps there would be a call for him, and he expressed himself as ready, in case there was.

CHAPTER VI.

SUPPOSED TO BE DARREL.

ON the following morning there was cause for new excitement.

Some early risers discovered it first, and soon the whole camp was astir to learn all about it.

A great notice had been discovered on the board front of the forum—to use that word again for so unworthy a structure—a notice plain and bold.

It was as follows:

"NOTICE!

"DICK DARREL, BEWARE!

"We have heard of your boastful threats regarding us. You do not know the kind of men with whom you have to deal. We are invisible in act as well as in fact. If you ar' now in Imperial, you had better escape with your life while you may. We have taken oath that y u shall die. You can not hope to overcome foes whom you can not see. Be wise, ere it is too late. We mean it. Further, let the citizens of Imperial be careful how they assist you against us, lest they share your fate.

"Yours in warning,

"INVISIBLE SEVEN."

"It seems to be a warning to us all," commented the marshal, when he read it.

"That's what it is," agreed Ham Stanton.

"But we don't scare worth a cent, I reckons."

"Then it won't deter you from helping Darrel, if chance offers, eh?"

"You lead the way," responded Ham, "an' I'll show ye how close I'll be at yer heels, marshal."

"That's the talk. We will allow no such idle threats to deter us from doing our duty. Rather let the Invisibles beware of us! That is more like it."

"You is right."

In less than an hour after the discovery, the whole population was out on the Square, filled with eager curiosity.

The matter was discussed from every standpoint, and the great question was: Who are the Invisible Seven?

And there were other questions of no less importance; these concerning Dick Darrel.

Where was he? In what manner of disguise this time?

No one answered the questions.

It was about an hour after breakfast, and there was still a great crowd around the Square, when a stranger rode into the "city."

He was a man of forty, at a guess, clad in dark clothes that gave him a clerical look, and mounted upon a big white mule. His coat was long, and his pockets bulged with papers.

Not a bad-looking man, he was none too neat in personal appearance. He had a tuft of beard under his chin that made him suggestive of a billy-goat, while a tall hat of shabby roughness and battered-upness generally did not go to make him any too genteel.

Stopping his mule in the middle of the Square, facing the hotel, where the larger portion of the crowd was, he shouted:

"All hail, citizens! All hail, all hail!"

And he stretched forth his right arm at full length, palm up, as if by the way of emphasizing his hail.

He had the attention of everybody, naturally.

"Yes, all hail!" he exclaimed yet again. "In

the midst of life we are in death, you know, and it's better late than never."

"A snide preacher, b'gosh!" exclaimed Ham Stanton, disgustedly.

"The uncertainty of life and the certainty of death," the stranger ran on, in loud voice, "are matters that stare us in the face. Truth is mighty—mighty scarce in some instances, and you can't get out of it. Hence the question arises—What are you going to do about it?"

With that he drew in his long right arm from its extended position, and hit an attitude with both arms akimbo.

"A darn sanctimonious crank!" ejaculated Simon Slow, contemptuously.

Rev. Bray was in the crowd, but he did not push to the fore.

He had had one taste of wandering evangelist lately, and evidently the sore had not healed.

But they were mistaken in their estimate, for this man was no preacher, as they were soon to learn.

No one answered his question, and after a moment's pause he spoke up again in the same loud voice as before, answering it himself.

"What are you going to do about it, I demand!" he cried. "I'll tell you the best thing that you can do, looking the grim truth squarely in the face, and that is—*Get insured!* Gentlemen, I represent the Great Hoard Up and Hold Fast Insurance Company, the finest organization of its kind in the world!"

With that his hands went into a pocket on either side of his coat, coming forth again with a fling, and great flaming flag-like posters were unfurled to the morning breeze. The stranger was showing his colors.

"That's what you want to do about it," he cried.

"Where do you hail from, sir?" inquired Gold-plate George.

"From the mighty city of Chicago, the pride of the nation, sir!" was the instant reply.

"And where are you going?"

"My business just now, sir, is right here!" was the response. "I have the good of humanity at heart. I want to insure every man, woman and child in your camp."

"City, sir, if you please," corrected Lawyer Corker.

"Ha! A city, eh? Beg your pardon, citizens. My blunder, and my treat as soon as I have properly introduced myself. By the way, your city has a mayor, as goes without saying. I would like to see him."

"I am marshal of the place, sir," announced Gold-plate.

"Ha! I should have been able to tell that at once by your bearing, sir, had I my eyes about me. Fact is, I have been long in the saddle, and am about tuckered. I want to get permission, sir, to do business in your cam— Ha! your pardon; *city*."

"You mean insurance business?"

"To be sure."

"Well, I guess you can go ahead, if you can find anything to insure."

"It is a duty that every man owes to his family, friends and creditors, to get out an insurance on his life," the agent spouted. "Death is a certainty, as we all know, but the sting is nipped in the bud if you have a policy in the Great Hold Up and Hold Fast. I present to you the opportunity of a lifetime, gentlemen."

"An' what if a feller ain't got no family, friends or creditors?" asked Simon Slow.

"Then leave it to some other fellow's family, friends or creditors, and they will rise up and call you blessed," was the reply.

"An' what about that treat?" asked some one else in the crowd.

"Business first and pleasure after," was the response.

"That's what I means," the fellow rejoined. "When a stranger says treat, we gen'lly makes that ther fu'st busines ter be 'tended to."

"Very well; be with you in a minute. I won't forget. Half the enjoyment of the spice of life is in the anticipation, you know. I am talking insurance now. Let me impress upon you the importance of insurance."

"But, a feller has ter die to win," some one objected.

"And haven't you got to die anyhow? With a policy, you answer the call with a full hand, that's the diff'rence, my friend."

"And let some other feller marry yer widdy, and live like a prince on ther price of yer life, hey? Not any in mine. Stranger, it hits me you has struck a hard place this hyar time."

"Wait and see, sir. Perhaps you will be the first man I'll insure. Now, no more for the present, but to attend to that treat. Gentlemen all, let me introduce myself to you: I am

Phineas Teaberry, duly authorized agent for the Great Hoard Up and Hold Fast Insurance Company. If I can be accommodated here at the United States Hotel, I shall make my headquarters there during my stay."

"Yas; but that treat?"

"I am with you now. Will somebody take charge of my mule? Thank you, sir. Be careful not to get within range of his hindquarters, unless you are insured."

With that, Phineas Teaberry slipped out of the saddle, leaving his mule in the keeping of a man who had volunteered to mind it for him, and led the way to the bar-room.

There he kept his word regarding the promise of a treat, and the eager crowd did full honor to him.

After the treat he registered, and when he had made arrangements for the care of his mule, began to talk insurance to every man he could corner.

There was a good deal of speculation regarding this man.

So much had been seen, of late, of wonderful disguises, that many were firm in the opinion that this was Dick Darrel.

Of these, Simon Slow was one of the strongest advocates. He tried to force the same idea into the mind of Ham Stanton, but to no purpose.

"I'll bet ye five dollars it's so," Simon offered.

"And I'll bet a fiver it isn't," Ham answered. "I think I'd know Dick Darrel now, no matter what rig he put on."

"All right; it's done. It's five even, whether it is Dick Darrel or it ain't him. Ham, you ar' goin' ter lose, sure as smoke."

"It's an easy thing ter be mistaken, Simon. You wait now till Dicky makes hisself known, an' see whar you'll be. You'll find that Ham kin see straight yet, if he ain't as young as he used to was."

CHAPTER VII.

SOMETHING MORE TO PONDER OVER.

"Who is that you are talking about, boys?" Ham and his companion looked quickly around to see who had overheard.

It was Sinclair Fowley, who was standing near them and who had not been noticed before.

"Why, that ar' stranger," answered Simon. "I'mbettin' Ham a fiver that it's Dick Darrel, in another of his make-ups."

"And you are betting it isn't, eh, Ham?"

"That's what I am, sir."

"Well, you may be mistaken."

"I don't think he could fool me a third time, sir."

"I don't know about that. But, maybe you know it isn't Darrel."

Fowley looked Ham squarely in the eyes as he said this, as if to read his mind.

"An' mebby I don't," Ham responded, returning the look steadily enough. "But he ain't got Dick Darrel's look about him."

"Neither had the Italian, had he?"

"Waal, no."

"Nor the Indian, eh?"

"No."

"And yet these were Dick Darrel, as we afterward learned. No one would have believed it."

"You is right, so fur."

"Then why not believe that this man is he? It looks a good deal more reasonable, to my way of thinking."

"Waal, mebby you is right, Mister Fowley; but I don't believe it."

"But you do, Simon?"

"You bet I do; but it won't do ter let it out, fer it might upset his plans for ther capture of ther Seven."

"On, of course not; we won't mention it, only among ourselves. Let him work it in his own way. Of course it wouldn't be safe for him to come here without disguise of some sort."

And with that Mr. Fowley passed on, leaving Ham and Simon to their talk.

Many others were of the same opinion as Simon Slow and Sinclair Fowley, and it was soon no secret anywhere.

Groups of men stared at the stranger for minutes at a time, while he was industriously talking insurance to some cornered victim, but none could satisfactorily answer the problem.

Was he, or was he not? That was the question.

This was a stage day at Imperial.

The day passed quietly, and the hour for the stage to arrive soon came.

On the public Square the usual stage-day crowd was congregated, and presently the word was passed that the stage was coming.

The crowd was immediately augmented by the

exodus from the hotels and saloons and other resorts, and Uncle Josey was seen bearing down toward the Square about on time.

In a few moments more the old "hearse" was at hand.

"Whoop!" sung out Josey. "Hyar we is ergain, me boyees. How do I find ye?"

"Yer finds us alive an' kickin'," was the response. "But, what has yer got aboard this hyar time?"

"Peel yer eyes an' see fer yerselves," was the answer. "Come, folkses," to his passengers, "we has arrove, so tumble out o' thar."

On top were two or three men who had the appearance of miners, and one Chinaman.

These were already getting down, the Chinaman last, when some one in the crowd exclaimed:

"Yang Kee, by ther tarnel!"

"Durn me if it ain't!" echoed another.

"Hard matter ter disguise a Chinee, I'd opine."

At mention of his nationality, the Chinaman looked around, having sprung to the ground.

And his doing so seemed to confirm the recognition that had already been made. He certainly looked like Dick Darrel's Celestial.

There was no time for further comment or question just then, for the door of the stage had opened and a woman's dainty foot had touched the step and her form filled the door.

She sprung out, a rather good-looking young woman of twenty-five or so, clad in neat but plain traveling dress.

Another immediately followed, a younger woman somewhat resembling the other, and similarly clad.

The Chinaman immediately gave proof that he was their servant.

He stepped forward, took their bags and wraps, and brought forth other things from the stage.

The two women looked around at the crowd coolly, then glanced at the hotel, and led the way in that direction, the Chinaman following.

"If that ain't Yang Kee I'm a snoozer," declared Simon Slow.

"Then that's what yer be," disputed Ham Stanton, "fer it ain't him no more'n I be."

"Why, darn it, Ham, do yer mean ter tell me that I can't see straight?" cried Simon. "I leave it to ther crowd."

But the crowd seemed to have settled it in Simon's favor already.

The general belief was that this was Yang Kee.

However, the Chinaman did not recognize anybody there, but went straight ahead after the women, attending to his own business.

When the driver had exchanged some remarks with those in the crowd, and had put out the mail and other matter he had brought, he drove off, and the crowd to a great extent broke up.

Meantime the two women had gone straight into the hotel, and the elder had entered the bar-room.

The Chinaman remained in the hall with the younger.

"Can you accommodate us with room and lodging, sir?" the woman asked of Charlie Bloomie, the clerk.

"Yes, ma'm," was the answer.

She inquired the terms, and so forth, and when it was understood, the clerk pushed the register toward her.

Taking up the pen, she wrote, in a bold, free hand:

MABLE SILVERTON, }
GRACE SILVERTON, }
Oakland, Cal }

"And now about our Chinese servant," she said. "Will you permit him to eat in the kitchen and sleep in the hall?"

"I guess there will be no trouble about that," promised Charlie.

"Very well, and thank you, sir."

The clerk called a boy who was a sort of handy Jack about the house, and the new guests were shown to their room.

Scarcely sooner had the woman left the bar-room than Gold-plate George came in and looked at the register, with more than ordinary interest, it seemed.

"She didn't put down the name of that Chinee," he observed.

"No," said the clerk.

"Did you see the cuss?"

"Only at a distance, when he was getting down."

"The boys all say it's Yang Kee, Doctor Conrad's old Celestial."

"He looks enough like him."

Dandy Dick's Dragnet.

"And we believe that this Phineas Teaberry is no other than Dick Darrel."

"I can't say anything about that; the devil himself couldn't swear to that man, I believe."

"And you're more than half right, too."

That ended the remarks, and soon after that the marshal was in conversation with Lawyer Corker and Baldwin Bloom.

It was only a little later when the women's Chinese servant came down and into the bar-room.

Ham Stanton and Simon Slow were there, among others.

The Chinaman was asking for water for the room, saying there was none there, and Ham and Simon looked up.

"It's ther Chinee, Simon," said Ham.

"Yas; Yang Kee, sure enough."

"Get out! No more Yang Kee than you be."

"I'll prove it to yer," cried Simon, getting up.

Crossing to where the Chinaman stood, he slapped him on the back.

"Hello, Yang Kee!" he cried. "Whar did yer hail from this hyar time? What ye doin' hyar?"

The Chinaman gave a start as the hand fell upon him, and looked around with a face of alarm.

"Me no sabe," he gasped.

"I say how-d-do," cried Simon. "Give us yer fin."

He took the fellow's limp hand as he said this, and shook it heartily.

The Chinaman looked at him in a helpless sort of way, as if wishing he might soon make his escape.

There seemed to be little of Yang Kee's snap about the fellow.

CHAPTER VIII.

MARSHAL PIERRE NONPLUSED.

WHILE he shook the Celestial's hand, Simon was looking hard into his face.

And even as he looked, an expression of doubt came over his own. Certainty was not so sure a thing as it had been.

"Saay, what's yer name?" Simon demanded.

"Me name Hop Wah," was the reply.

"Never heerd o' Yang Kee, did yer?"

"Me no sabe."

"No, in course yer don't; cuss ye! Yer wouldn't tumble if ther house fell in on ye. Whar ar' ye from?"

"Me flom San F'lisco."

"And yer name is Hop Wah?"

"Allee samee."

"Whar did yer leave Dandy Dick?"

The Celestial shook his head solemnly.

"No sabe, no sabe," he muttered.

"No; an'darn me if I sabe, either," growled Simon, as he dropped the hand and turned back again to where Ham stood.

Ham was laughing at him in a quiet way.

"Waal, Simey, what did yer make out of it? I opine ye ain't as sartain as ye was."

"You hit it jest right," growled Mr. Slow, slowly. "If that ar' heathen ar' Yang Kee, darn me if he ain't most as good as Darrel himself."

Ham laughed, making some response as they passed out, and they bent their steps in the direction of the Peach Blow.

When supper was called at the United States that evening, it was a motley assembly that encircled the board.

At the head of the board was Phineas Teaberry, whose tongue was even longer than his name.

Next to him sat Gideon Gobles, his wife Hannah beside him, and their Chinese servant standing behind their chairs.

Further down, on the same street, were the late arrivals, the Misses Silverton, and opposite them sat George Pierre and Sinclair Fowley.

Then there were others, of varying types, who need not be mentioned in particular. All together, it was a heterogeneous gathering, as said at first.

Gold-plate George and Mr. Fowley were talking between themselves, while Mr. Teaberry held sway over the rest of the board, giving them insurance as though that was all he knew.

"And do I understand that you have lost a son, sir?" he presently demanded of Gideon Gobles.

"If you understand it that way, sir, you understand it aright," was the grave reply.

"Insured?"

"No, sir."

"Too bad, too bad. It witnesses to the truth of what I have been saying, on this very line.

Now, if your son had only been insured for a few thousands, sir, see what a benefit he would have conferred upon you."

"And do you suppose we would have taken any price for our dear boy?" cried Mrs. Gobles.

"Positively not, dear madam," was the response. "But, grim death never takes our affections into account. He touches where he will, and spares not. Therefore, it is meet that we should be the more prepared for him when he comes like a thief in the night to rob us of our dear ones."

"But we don't know that our Simeon is dead."

"Er—a—what's that?"

"We don't know that he is dead."

"Why, sir," to Gideon, "you said you had lost a son."

"And so we have," was the affirmation; "but I didn't say anything about his being dead, did I?"

"Ha! you are a fortunate man. It may not be too late yet. Get him insured, get him insured at once, and if the worst comes you will be happy."

"Happy!" cried Mrs. Gobles, horrified.

Gideon looked at the man in scorn and contempt.

"Happy, at such a time," he almost groaned.

"Have you no heart in your bosom?" demanded Mrs. Gobles.

"Sir, madam," cried the unfortunate Teaberry, in bumble apology, "forgive me. You do not understand. No one knows better than I how sad a thing death is; but you must agree with me that a policy at such a time is a soothing balm in the majority of cases."

"Wretch!"

"I would not wound your feelings, ma'am. Let it be admitted that there are exceptions to every rule! You are the exception to this. But, this lost son of yours, let us suppose he never is found—"

"Gideon!" cried Mrs. Gobles, almost in tears; "Gideon, make him stop, or I must leave the room."

"Noble mother!" exclaimed Teaberry, before Gobles could speak. "It is of such as thou that poets sing. I have done. I will say no more. Let us hope that this son yet lives, and that he may soon be clasped to your breast as of yore."

The fond mother cheered up at once.

"Noble parents!" the voluble Teaberry cried. "How easy it is to be mistaken. Noble-hearted parents! Model parents! Your thought is not for yourselves, but for the missing boy. I made a wrong suggestion. It is you who should get insured for his benefit."

Mr. and Mrs. Gobles looked at each other.

"Am I not right?" cried Teaberry. "I leave it to the company present. Your hearts' affections are centered upon this worthy youth. What more fitting then, as a lasting showing of your regard, than for each of you to take out a big policy in the greatest company on earth?"

"I had never thought of it that way, Hannah," said Gideon to his better half.

"But, we won't leave him by any means poor," reminded Mrs. Gobles.

"That is just the point," cried the agent, warming up to it. "You are well fixed, I take it. So much the better. You can afford the large policies. When you go to your fathers, so to say, you can leave your boy double what you are worth; and you know that the span of your years is narrowing day by day. That young man will have double reason to cherish your memory and follow your precepts."

"We will think about it," said Gideon.

"If you could only restore him to us now," sighed Mrs. Gobles.

"Perhaps you may have seen him in your travels, sir," suggested Gideon, with sudden interest.

"It is possible," agreed Teaberry.

"His name is Simeon Gobles, sir; a fair, slight young man, with freckles all over his face, and blind in one eye. The other eye, sorry to have to add, is crossed. Afflictions seldom come single you know."

"I haven't seen him," said the insurance man, promptly. "The description is so plain that it does not require long study to answer the question. I have not seen him. If I had, I should remember it. Yes; think it over, Mr. Gobles, and we will see further about the scheme."

The talkative agent had not the board so much to himself now as he had been having.

Marshal Pierre had opened conversation with the Misses Silverton.

Seeing this, Teaberry gave way a little.

"So, you are from Oakland, eh?" the marshal had just remarked.

"Yes, sir," answered Miss Mable.

"And that accounts for your having a Chinese servant, I presume?"

"Why so, sir?"

The proximity to San Francisco. Mr. Gobles here is from San Francisco, and you see he has one."

The lady spoke passingly to Mrs. Gobles.

"By the way," said Pierre, "this Chinaman of yours, Miss Silverton, looks very much like one that went away from here only a short time ago."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; and so much so that some of the boys have noticed it, and some declare positively that it is the same fellow. But, of course, that cannot be."

"No; for we have never been here before, and our servant has not been absent from us in two years. He is a devoted fellow, and we like him very well. His name is Hop Wah."

"This other's name was Yang Kee."

"That settles the question, then. You may tell them they are mistaken."

"As I certainly will. But, you know, all Chinamen seem to look more or less alike, to our American eyes."

"In a general way, yes," agreed Miss Grace, the younger.

Whatever Gold-plate had been trying to get at, it was plain that he had not made anything.

If that Chinaman was Yang Kee, he certainly had two artful defenders; and if it was he, who were they?

Perhaps some such question as that was turning itself in the marshal's mind, for he soon lapsed into a thoughtful silence, and soon after all rose from the table.

The ladies went at once to their room, as did also Mr. Phineas Teaberry, and in their rooms something of a surprise awaited them all. They found there messages of singular import.

CHAPTER IX.

PUT TO THE TEST.

WHEN Phineas Teaberry entered his room, and had closed the door after him, a new expression came upon his face.

From his bland, half-smiling self, as Phineas Teaberry, the insurance agent, a grim and stern look came into his face, his jaws seemed to square, and his goat-like beard seemed out of place beneath such a chin as his.

Dropping upon a chair a sigh escaped him, and he let go of himself for the moment, as a disciple of Belsarte might say.

He lay back, resting his head, and his arms hung listlessly at his sides, a tired look following the first change noted, and he closed his eyes.

This was only for a few moments, and he sat up again, light burned in his keen eyes, and he rose and stepped to the window of his room and looked out, resting a hand on the table.

After a momentary view of the scene he turned away, and as he did so his eye caught sight of a folded paper on the table.

Taking it up with half-interest, he looked at it, and as he did so something made him start.

Penciled on one side of the paper was his own name, thus:

"PHINEAS TEABERRY, ESQ."

"What can this mean?" he asked himself, half-aloud. "Who can have written a note to me?"

Opening it, a yet greater surprise awaited him as he read the message it contained.

It was as follows:

"To Mr. TEABERRY:—

"You are in danger here at Imperial City. You are mistaken for another person, who has enemies here who seek his life. Be on your guard every moment, if you remain; but it will be safer for you to get away. I have done my duty in warning you. Look out for yourself." THE OTHER FELLOW."

"The other fellow, eh?" the finder commented, smiling to himself.

"Another Teaberry, perhaps," he added, when he had read it again. "Wonder what it means, anyhow?"

He looked at the writing critically and thoughtfully, at first reaching to his lip as if to pull a mustache, but contenting himself by tugging at his whisker.

"Mistaken for another person, am I?" he reflected. "My life in danger, and I must be on my guard every moment. That is, if I remain; and I think I shall. This must be the sum of all the whisperings I have noticed."

Folding the paper, he tore it into bits and cast it into a corner.

"Yes: it must be that I am mistaken for this Dick Darrel, of whom so much is said." That

grim smile again came over his face. "Well, if I am, I shall have to do justice to his character to the best of my poor ability, I suppose. Perhaps I had better get insured."

He resumed his seat, and became thoughtful.

"And what is the sum and substance of it all, anyhow? If I am in danger, I must know something about it, so as to be on the lookout. It seems that this Darrel has crossed swords with a certain band of outlaws known as the Invisible Seven, and it was thought that they had laid him out, but he has come to life again."

"Now, according to what is said, he claims to have detected the rascals, and is going to hunt them out, and bring them to account. On the other hand, they have made vows anew to put him out of their way for good and all. Perhaps it is Darrel who has warned me—yes, it must have been. Ha, ha! I should like to meet the men and make his acquaintance. Perhaps I shall."

Again that smile, and if those who suspected him of being Dick Darrel could have seen it, they would have believed their suspicion confirmed.

Meanwhile, the Misses Silverton had entered their room, and almost immediately Miss Grace found a note on their table.

"See here, Mable," she cried; "what can this be?"

She held it up to view as she spoke.

"Is it addressed to us?"

"Yes; to both."

"Read it."

The finder opened it and glanced at the contents, when her face suddenly paled and her hand began to tremble.

Immediately the elder sister sprung to her side, took the note from her trembling fingers, and read it, her own face paling as she did so.

It was similar to that which had been found by Mr. Teaberry.

It was worded as follows:

"To THE MISSES SILVERTON:—

"The writer of these lines has reason to believe that you are in danger here. Certainly your servant is, for he is suspected of being one Yang Kee, who is not in good repute at this place. Be watchful, and be ready to defend yourselves if need be. However, you have friends here, of whom I am one. For the present I must remain—**INCOKNITO.**"

"What does it say?" the young sister asked.

The elder read it aloud to her, in low tone.

"Oh, what can it mean?" the younger exclaimed. "Who can mean harm to us, I wonder? We must tell—"

"Sh! Mention no name, Grace. We can attend to that. But, who can this Incognito be? And who can mean us harm? Do you know, I am really afraid."

"But we are armed, and are not without protection."

"And not without friends, either, according to this message. But, our foes; who are they?"

"We cannot know, since the note does not tell us. Possibly we are near the end of our search, and have been recognized."

"Heaven forbid! That might mean death to us both, unless we find out just who our foe is. We are armed, however, and are not afraid to use our weapons."

Just then came a tap at the door, in a peculiar way.

"It is Hop Wah," spoke Mable.

Grace stepped to the door and opened it.

The guess had been a correct one, and the Chinaman came in.

He noted at once the agitation of the sisters, and looked from one to the other in an inquiring way.

"Hop," said Mable, "we have just been warned that we have enemies here, and that you are in danger. You must look out for yourself."

"Allee samee!" grinned the Celestial.

"It does not seem to frighten you badly," said Grace.

"No use gittee scared 'fore gittee hurt," was the logical response.

"There is something in that," agreed Mable, "but you must be on the lookout and see that no harm is done you."

"Allee samee do that."

"Have you heard of a Yang Kee since you have been here?"

The Celestial grinned from ear to ear, as though something tickled him very much.

"Yes; allee samee takee Hop Wah for Yang Kee," he answered. "Hop Wah say he no sabe; allee samee him no sabe what mean."

"Well, I'll tell you, Hop. This Yang Kee is in danger here, and they think you are he; you can see what that may lead to. You must be very careful, Hop."

The Celestial was still grinning.

"You bettee!" he assured. "Me allee samee lookee out."

Some orders were given him, then, and he set about his duties, and finally, being needed no longer, was allowed to go.

As he left the room he was accosted in the hall by the Chinese servant who was with Gobles.

It was in his native tongue that he was addressed, and what he said none might know.

Their talk was of short duration, anyhow, and Hop Wah went on his way.

It was a little later when there was a knock at the door of the room occupied by Mr. Teaberry.

That personage straightened himself up, became the insurance agent at once, and bade the applicant come in.

The door opened, and entered Mr. Sinclair Fowley.

"Ha!" the insurance agent exclaimed. "I am glad to see you, Mr. Fowley. I hope you have been thinking favorably of what we have talked about."

"Insurance?"

"Exactly."

"Sorry to disappoint you, sir, but I haven't thought a word about it since. I have come to see you on another matter entirely."

Fowley had now closed the door, and taken a seat near the agent.

"Not insurance, eh? Well, then, I am at your service, sir; let me know what is your pleasure."

"See here, Darrel," cried the mine-manager, laughing, "what is the use of your trying to deceive me? I know you, sir, you see."

Fowley had a confident smile on his face, as he looked sharply into the eyes of the suspected man, and Mr. Teaberry returned his stare with blank amazement.

"I don't want to doubt that you know what you are talking about, Mr. Fowley," he said, in response, "but bless me if I do. What is your meaning, anyhow? Darrel, Darrel—isn't that the name of the missing man here that I have heard of?"

CHAPTER X.

BY A CLEVER ARTFUL DODGE.

MR. FOWLEY grew red in spite of himself. That confident smile had faded, and he looked at Mr. Teaberry in a wondering way.

Still, he was not quite ready to give up. He had evidently made up his mind to settle the question one way or the other.

"I did not expect this of you," he complained.

"You did not expect what of me, sir?" asked Teaberry, pleasantly.

"That you would refuse to take me into your confidence. Can't you trust me, Dick Darrel?"

"My dear sir," cried the insurance man, with all the earnestness he could summon, "I am not Dick Darrel. You have made a great mistake."

"Well, if you won't, you won't; but I thought you might trust me. Besides, I have something mighty important to reveal to you, and that's what has brought me here now."

"If it is anything secret for Darrel, sir," said Teaberry, "don't tell it to me, for I tell you candidly that I am not he. What has made you suspect that I am? Do I look so much like him? What is it?"

"Are you telling me the truth?"

"Of course I am."

"And you swear that you are not Dick Darrel?"

"Yes; if you demand it, I swear that I am not that man."

"Well, then I'm mistaken, that's all, and of course can't tell you what I desire to tell him."

"Certainly not, Mr. Fowley."

There was a pause.

"Will you tell me what has led you to suspect me of being Darrel?" the insurance man asked.

"Haven't you heard the story?" the manager inquired.

"No; you know I have been here only a short time. I have heard the name, and gleaned some idea of the story, that's all."

"I'll tell you, then."

Mr. Fowley told the story of Dick Darrel, then, as fully as he knew it himself, dwelling at length upon that part that had come under his own observation there at Imperial.

"You see, sir," he concluded, "a man who could adapt himself to any disguise, and at such short notice, is to be suspected in any form or make-up, reasonable or unreasonable; and as you happened here about the time when he was naturally looked for, I may be excused for making the mistake it seems to have made."

"Now I can see and understand," said Mr.

Teaberry. "I hope I have satisfied you that I am not the man. If I had been, I do not believe I could have kept the secret, after the blunt way in which you opened upon me. Ha! ha! That was a rich joke. I would like to see you go for the real Darrel in the same fashion, and see how he would take it."

"I only wish I could find him, for what I have to tell him is important, and he should know of it."

"And I wish I could help you: but as I have never seen the man, and as you expect him to appear in disguise anyhow, I can be of little use. But, sir, about that insurance?"

"Don't talk insurance to me just now, I beg. I have other things to think about. I'll see you later about that."

"All right, and don't forget. I'll give you a reduction, for to have your name as a starter would be a big card for me here. And, by the way, should you get on track of Darrel, let me know. I'm interested."

Mr. Fowley gave a half promise respecting both propositions, and cutting the talk short at that, went out.

No sooner had he gone than that grim smile came again upon Mr. Teaberry's face.

"Took me to be Dick Darrel, did he?" he mused to himself. "Well, I wonder if I succeeded in convincing him of his mistake? I wonder if I did?"

Night came on and settled down over the little valley, and the lamps of Imperial City made their best effort in a puny way to rival the daylight that had departed.

The business of the evening began as usual, the Princess Primrose Saloon being the leading resort.

At the hotel all was quiet.

The Gobles retired early, as usual, and the newer arrivals the same; except Mr. Teaberry, who paid a visit to the Primrose.

If he expected to do any business there, it was plain to him that he must make himself one of the boys, and that he was willing to do, as appeared.

The fun of the evening was at its height when he entered the resort, discordant music being coaxed out of the old barrel organ Dick Darrel had brought to the camp, and several couples trying to dance to its disjointed time.

"That's what I like to see!" cried Teaberry, clapping his hands, when the dance ended.

"That's the way to do it, boys! Life is short at best, and you want to crowd in all the fun you can. And then, if you have a policy to back you, you can toss dull care to the winds, and wade right in."

"Hello!" cried one of the dancers, "it's Old Teaberry!"

"Nobody else, I assure you," Teaberry cried.

"Here I am, Teaberry the true, Teaberry the brave. I'm the friend of every man, and want to do every man good. We pass this way only once, my brave boys, so let us go in for having some sport. Strike up that music again, my friend, and I'll show you a Teaberry waltz. Who will be my partner for the dance?"

With that, he caught up the tails of his long coat and twirled around a few times in a way that might have made old Terpsichore giddy.

The crowd laughed, the music struck up again, and a red-shirted miner offering himself as a partner, Teaberry caught hold of him and they went into the dance wildly.

Further back in the room were seated several persons who are known to us.

They were around a table, and a bottle of the so-called "soothing syrup," the best of the house, was before them.

They were Baldwin Bloome, Goodman Crawley, Lawyer Corker and Gold-plate George the marshal.

They were smoking and talking, evidently talking upon a weighty matter, since they appeared serious enough in mood.

At the entrance of the insurance man, and his loud remarks, they all looked up, and now seemed interested in what was going on where he was.

"Well, what do you think about it?" asked Gold-plate.

"I'm betting it's him," said Goody Crawl.

"He's got jest his build."

"But, Fowley says the contrary, now; or anyhow he is mighty much in doubt about it."

"No matter what Fowley says," remarked Baldy Bloome. "We must remember it is Dick Darrel we are dealing with. He could fool any of us."

"We'll find out about that," said Marshal Pierre. "I have posted Big Ben to get up a row with him, and if it is Darrel we'll see a display of his strength, very likely. Wait awhile."

"That's a good idea," the others agreed. The "Big Ben" referred to was a sort of local bruiser.

He was not the greatest fighter the camp could boast, perhaps, but he was a "hard nut to crack," as was said of him.

He was in the room, and in fact was one among the dancers, he and another fellow of about the same stamp acting as partners and going into it as if their lives depended on it.

"Do you see what he's up to?" Goody presently asked.

"Strikes me he wants to have a collision with Teaberry," said Baldy.

"That's it, exactly," agreed Corker. "He's going to provoke a quarrel, and that's his way of doing it."

"And mercy help him if it does prove to be the man we think it is," laughed Gold-plate George. "He'll get more than he bargains for."

About the time he said that, Big Ben and Teaberry came together with force, and Big Ben let out a bellow that would have done fair credit to an angry bull.

The dancing was stopped in a second, the music ceased, and all eyes were upon Big Ben and the man with whom he had collided.

"I beg your pardon, friend, I beg your pardon," Teaberry hastened to apologize, with a low bow and a flourish of his hand. "It was my awkwardness, no doubt, and I'm sincerely sorry."

"An' I'll make ye more sorry, too!" bellowed Ben. "Yer is a darn awkward old cow ter be on ther dance floor, that's what ye ar', an' I'm goin' ter punch yer head fer ye. D'y'e hear what I'm tootin' at ye? I'm goin' ter wipe ther floor wi' ye!"

"My dear, good man," urged Teaberry, "it was an accident, nothing in the wide world but an accident, I assure you. Pray don't be hasty. There is no harm done, that is to say, no serious harm, considering what it might have been. Let me write up a policy for you—"

"Durn yer policy!" was the whoop. "Yer needs one yerself, I'm tellin' ye, fer I'm goin' ter split ye up ther back like ary salted shad, an' don't ye forget it! I'll show ye what it means ter run up ergaint a gentleman when he's dancin' his purtiest! I'm goin' ter scour yer rear buttons right hyar on ther floor, an' hyar I come fer ye! Yer has waked up a sleepin' triang'lar cyclone, I'm shoutin'!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE UNCERTAINTY OF CERTAINTIES.

WHETHER real or pretended, Teaberry seemed frightened.

He backed away from the storming big fellow, waving his hands at him to keep him off.

"Don't, don't be hasty!" he urged. "Can't you accept an apology when it is so humbly offered? I don't want to be roughly handled."

"Nothin' but ber-lud, nothin' but gore, will satterfy me," cried Big Ben, as he followed him up. "Come, put up them ar' dukes o' yours, or down ye goes afore ye is awee of it."

"But, my dear, good man," protested Teaberry, "it was an accident! I wouldn't have done it on purpose for the world. In fact, it didn't seem to me to be any more my fault than yours, yet see how ready I was to take it all upon myself. Shows you I was sorry."

"An' yer will be more sorry, I'm tellin' ye!"

"But, I can't fight, my dear man, and you will have it all your own way."

"Oh! let up on him, Ben," some one cried. "He's a good feller, an' it ar' plain enough he didn't mean it."

"Nary a let up!" snorted Ben. "I'm goin' ter punch his nose fer him, ter remind him ter look whar he's goin' another time. Come hyar, durn ye!"

He had now pressed Mr. Teaberry into a corner, and made a reach for him with his left arm.

How it happened, no one could say, but in the same moment Mr. Ben was lifted off his feet, made to turn a complete somerset, and was landed several feet away in a disgraceful heap.

"What did I tell you?" cried Gold-plate George, clutching Goody Crawl by the arm with force.

"But, how in the world did he do it?" demanded Goody, greatly perplexed by the suddenness of what had been done.

"Hang me if I could tell," declared Baldy Bloomie. "It was done so quick that I couldn't see how it was done. That's him, sure!"

"Of course it is!" agreed Gold-plate. "We have overreached him this time, and I wonder what he'll say when we tell him it was a put-up job on him?"

"But how did he do it?" urged Corker. "He seemed simply to reach out, and away went Big Ben as though he had been lifted by the hind legs of a mule. I did not hear any blow, did you?"

No one had, and they were puzzled.

Mr. Teaberry was standing and looking at the fallen man, his face a picture of surprise, as if he too wondered what had happened.

Big Ben was now righting himself and getting to his feet. His face was very red, and he was glaring around in a half-foolish fashion, as though looking to see if anybody had noticed his fall.

"What was ther matter with yer, Ben?" some one demanded.

"Yer went off afore ye was ready, didn't ye? It looked like it, anyhow."

"Do yer get them spells often? We thort ye was tryin' ter learn ter fly, ye went up so flighty."

The big bully was now upon his feet.

"Who done that 'ar?" he demanded. "Did anybody see who done it?" and he glared around.

"As I was saying," remarked the insurance man, "a policy is just the thing you need, my friend. Life has so many ups and downs that we are never sure what is going to happen next."

"Who done that 'ar ter me?" Big Ben reiterated. "Jest show him to me, an' see me lam him! Who was it caught me by ther belt in that foul way an' jerked me off my pins? P'int him out, an' see ther fun thar 'll be!"

"You have had a fair example of the uncertainty of certain things," calmly remarked Mr. Teaberry.

"An' you is goin' ter git a lesson in ther sartainty of sartain things," bellowed Mr. Ben.

"I beg off," cried the insurance man. "Won't you please accept my apology?"

"Was it you what lifted me that way? Saay, was it?"

"My dear fellow, can you believe such a preposterous thing?"

"But it was you, cuss yer, an' thar ain't but one other man in ther woolly West that could 'a' done it."

"And who is that?"

"Dick Darrel."

"Then have you the bee in your bonnet that I am Dick Darrel? Bless me, but I wish that individual would materialize; I am tired of being accused of stealing his thunder, as it were. Say, let's compromise things."

"What yer mean?"

"Let's all take something."

Big Ben, now under the firm impression that this man was indeed Dick Darrel, was glad to get out of the trouble in a way so honorable.

"Then yer chaws dirt, does yer?" he demanded.

"Yes, bushels of it."

"An' yer begs off wi' a treat?"

"Yes; anything to save my buttons."

The crowd was laughing, now, seeing the neat way in which Big Ben thought he was getting out of it honorably.

Many jeers were cast at him, and demands to know why he didn't carry out the terrible threats he had been making. To which he replied that he "couldn't lick a man what chawed dirt so."

Mr. Teaberry stood by his offer to treat, and while that was going on Pierre and his party passed out.

"Well, isn't it proof enough?" the marshal asked.

"We've never seen but one other fellow that could flip a man over like that," responded Goody.

"And that was Dick Darrel," finished Lawyer Corker.

"You have named him," decided Goody.

They passed on.

It was about this time that a stranger, a man in rough miner's dress, stood lounging in the shadows just outside the camp.

He had been there for a little time, and was apparently awaiting the coming of a comrade.

He was a rough-looking fellow, with bushy red hair and beard, and had his weapons in sight in a belt.

Presently out of the shadows crept another figure, and a Chinaman joined him.

"Well, what is the word?" the man of the red whiskers asked.

"Allee samee heap goodeel!" was the response.

"You have branded them all, then?"

"Yes; evely one."

"Good for you, Yank! It was a risky piece of work, but I knew that you could do it if anybody could."

"You bettee! Yang Kee no—what you call him?—slouch."

"I am aware of that, Yank. Now, you get back again without being seen, and lie low. I'm going to the Princess Primrose."

"Better lookee out, boss; allee samee much badee place."

"Oh, I will be all right there, Yank. Where is Hudson?"

"Him holdee fortee."

"All right, go back and join him, and don't worry about me if I'm not there for some time."

The Chinaman was soon off, and when he had been gone some moments the rough miner, as he looked to be, bent his steps in the direction of the Princess.

When he entered it was some minutes after Mr. Teaberry had treated the crowd, and that gentleman was seated at a table, talking insurance to a couple of men he had cornered, and one of these men was Ham Stanton.

Red Whiskers took a survey of the room for a moment, and sauntered down toward the rear. Most of the tables were full, but there happened to be a vacant chair at the one where Mr. Teaberry was holding forth.

Laying a hand on the chair, Red Whiskers asked:

"Any 'bjection to a man's settin' down hyar, folkses?"

"Not the least, so far as I am concerned," answered the insurance man, promptly.

"Reckon yer is welcome, seein' as we don't own ther chair," added Ham. "Sot right down, stranger."

"Have you any interest in insurance?" asked Teaberry.

"Insurance?" repeated Red Whiskers. "Bet your life I have, stranger."

"Ha! you are just the man I want to see, then."

"Yer is welcome ter look at me."

"Yes; to be sure; I see. But, I have been trying to induce these gentlemen to take out policies on their lives, and they hang fire—so to say. Now, sir, if you can say a few words in favor of insurance you may be the means of doing them a good turn by inducing them to—"

"Jest so, sir;" Red Whiskers interrupted. "But, maybe my interest in insurance wouldn't be jest what you'd want. Yer see, I have an uncle who is insured in my favor to the tune of several thousand dollars, and if any galoot has reason ter be interested in insurance, that galoot is me. That's about the length, breadth an' extent of my interest in insurance, sir. Yer is welcome to it, I'm sure."

CHAPTER XII.

SPREADING THE DRAGNET.

HAM laughed, while the insurance man looked disappointed.

"That is hardly the kind of recommendation I was seeking, sir," he said.

"Waal, it's ther best I have ter offer," returned Red Whiskers, soberly. "It's a live interest, I tell yer."

"An' I reckon I'd have interest in it on ther same plan," remarked Ham. "If yer kin scare up a few galoots willin' ter insure in my behalf, stranger, I'm with ye, every time."

"It begins to look as though I have struck a place where the merits of insurance are little known and less appreciated," averred Mr. Teaberry. "I have done fifty dollars' worth of talking since I came here, but haven't done fifty cents' worth of business."

"Yas; it does look rather bad, that's so," acquiesced Ham.

"Let's talk about something else, while I rest awhile," Teaberry suggested. "Did you know Dick Darrel, Mr. Stanton?"

"Waal, I opis I did," Ham answered.

"Then will you tell me why people will insist that I am he?"

"'Cause they don't know him as well as I do," responded Ham, promptly. "If they did, they'd know better."

"Then can't you set them right?"

"What's ther odds? As long as they think yer is Dickey, that loig they'll be mighty keeful how they monkey with ye. An' they're all ther more sure of ye now, after ther way ye done it fer Big Ben."

"Then they have respect for Darrel, eh?"

"Bet yer life on't!" cried Ham. "Dickey has tuned 'em, you bet."

"Toen it is something of an honor, I take it, to be mistaken for him, eh? I feel important."

"That's what it ar'. But yer had better keep yer eye skinned, fer he has some pizen enemies round hyar, an' they may try ter do ye up."

"I'll look out for them as well as I can. I

have told them that I am not the man they take me to be, and I can do no more than that."

"Is yer talkin' 'bout ther man what laid out that pizen outlaw?" asked the Red Whiskers.

"That's ther same one we means," was Ham's assurance.

"I'd like ter see him. I have heerd tell on him. Do yer know whar he is ter be seen?"

"If I did know I wouldn't be spittin' it out to strangers, that's sure," Ham declared. "I don't know you, mister."

"But, from yer sayin' that this man ain't Darrel, I opine you would know him if he was to appear in almost any disguise, eh? Think yer would?"

"I can't say as I would, fer sure," answered Ham; "but I opine I'd know ther feller that wasn't him."

"Did I understand this man ter call you Mister Stanton?"

"Reckons yer did, fer that's my name."

"Ham Stanton?"

"Prezack."

"Then darn me if you ain't ther very man I want ter see. Will yer step outside fer a minnit?"

"What do ye want ter see me fer?" Ham demanded, sharply.

"That's a purty question, b'gosh! If I want ed ter tell ye hyar I wouldn't ask ye outside, would I? I want ter see ye in private a couple o' seconds."

"All right, I'm with yer," assented Ham. "Pards, yer will excuse me?" to Teaberry and the other.

"Certainly, sir! certainly!" answered Teaberry.

And the other fellow said the same.

Red Whiskers had now risen, and Ham got up and followed him out.

As soon as they were outside, the stranger turned up the street, walking very slowly.

Ham was at his side in a moment, and demanded:

"Waal, what ar' it, stranger?"

"I thought you would know Dick Darrel anywhere!" was the low-spoken response.

"May I be eternally lammed!" exclaimed Ham, under his breath. "Darn me if I would a' believed it."

Dick laughed quietly.

"The truth has been forced upon me, Ham," he said, "that I was cut out for a detective. That is my business. I have nothing else to live for, as you know."

"Yer is a prime one, an' that's ther fack."

"Well, this case is ripening, and I want you to take a little ramble with me to-night. The Invisibles are going to hold a session, and I'll give you a view of them if they have any lights. Anyhow, you shall hear them. Will you go?"

"Will a Injun drink rum? In course I'll go, an' glad of ther chance. Didn't I tell yer to cail on me any time? I'm your huckleberry, Mister Dick, every time."

"Come right on, then, and we'll go now. We want to get there first."

Dick Darrel it was, and consequently, as the reader is aware, he and the insurance man could not be one and the same.

Talking as they proceeded, they passed out of the valley through the narrow pass, and ere long were feeling their way down through a narrow ravine that led to the place of rendezvous.

To quote their conversation were to reveal too much here. They pushed steadily forward, and in due time were at the pool of water in the woody glade of which mention has been made more than once.

For the last part of the distance they had said nothing, but had moved on quietly.

When they stopped at last, they listened several moments before either spoke.

Hearing nothing, Dick presently remarked:

"Well, we are here, and now to climb to that first shelf and get in position to wait and watch."

"Yas; an' it won't be no baby work ter git up there in ther dark, either. A fall will mean a broken back, more'n likely."

"I have arranged for that, Ham," Dick informed him. "I nave been here and have made a study of the lay of the ground. Just back here is a rope to assist us in the dangerous climb."

"You is a boss, Dick Darrel!"

"Sh! Not a word above a whisper, Ham. It is what any one would have done. I knew we would have to do our work here in the dark, and made preparations accordingly. Come with me."

With that, Dick caught hold of his companion by the sleeve and drew him after him around the margin of the pool and on and around behind a corner of the rocky height.

Their movements were slow, and presently Dick stopped.

"Here is the rope," he said. "Take hold of it, now, and climb to the shelf, and there await me."

"All right; an' I don't reckon I need ter ask if it ar' secure."

"It will hold you all right, Ham."

Ham laid hold and began to climb, and in a few minutes Dick felt the rope let go of by him.

Dick followed after, and in a short time both were together on the flat top, or shelf, where the Invisible Seven had first been seen by the ill-fated Jerky Jake, as told in a preceding story.

"Here we are, and here we are safe," spoke Dick.

"An' now all we has got ter do is ter set down an' wait, hey?"

"That is all we can do, Ham. And, bear in mind that our presence must not be made known to them, no matter what is said or done."

Making themselves as comfortable as circumstances would admit, they began their vigil, talking in whispers now and again, but for the most part watching in silence.

Some hours passed, and finally Dick gripped Ham's arm as a signal to remain silent.

Both listened, and steps were heard drawing near.

They came on to the edge of the pool, and others were heard following, and they continued until several persons had arrived.

No more steps being heard, finally one spoke.

"Well, how many are here?" he asked.

"All here!" was the answer.

"Give your numbers."

Numbers were repeated, from two to six.

"And I being Number One, we are all present," answered the first speaker.

"Shall we have light?" one asked.

"Yes; but first don the white, for fear another Jerky Jake may be around. We can't afford to take any risks, now."

There was silence again for some moments; but presently a light was struck, burning dimly at first, but growing brighter.

Around the pool were gathered six men, clad all in white, with long robe and cowl to match, one of the number holding the torch which he had just lighted.

The light grew brighter, as the torch blazed up, and suddenly a discovery was made. Across the breast of each of the six white robes were letters as of blood, forming these words:

"A MARKED MAN!"

CHAPTER XIII.

DRAWING TOWARD THE SEINE.

THESE words caught the eyes of the men in hiding at once.

In the next moment, almost, the chief of the six leaned forward and looked at them on the man nearest him.

"What means this?" he asked, excitedly, touching the man with his finger.

Every head leaned forward, and then each man looked at the other in evident amazement.

"It is on every one of you!" the leader exclaimed. "What does it mean? How came these words on your gowns?"

"They are on yours, too!"

The chief looked down, holding out the front of the robe so that he might see for himself.

"This is a poor joke, if it is the doings of any one of you," he cried.

"I did not do it," every man denied, at once and all together.

"Then how came it there?"

"Dick Darrel has done it, is my opinion."

"But how could he? Our robes have not been out of our hands, and how could he get at them?"

"And at all of them, too," added another. "It may be no trifling matter; it may mean all it implies. We may be marked."

"How can we be? Who has ever seen us and lived? How could any man detect us, with the care we exercise all the time? It seems impossible."

"And yet you see it isn't impossible, for each of us is branded as a doomed man. What is going to be done about it? How are we going to overcome such a devil as this Darrel is?"

"How do you know it was Darrel?"

"Who else can it have been?"

"Give it up."

"Yes, I guess you do. We are not dead yet, though. Our inning is coming now, and Dick Darrel shall die. If we are marked men, so is he, and we are going to get there first."

"But, suppose he has marked each one of us, as indeed he must have done, if this is his work. There is only one course of safety open

for us, and that is—to get out of here as soon as we can."

"Pshaw! you scare off too easy. Let us have another twenty-four hours, and he will be past all danger of doing us harm. We know who he is, now, and to-morrow night will see him trapped and put out of the way."

"But what if he takes us first? Who can tell what force he may have here at Imperial?"

"We don't care how much force he may have. The first showing he makes, we must be prompt to shoot him on the spot."

"That's the idea!"

"And we'll do it, too."

"And it may stop him a little; when he finds that Yang Kee has been dealt with already."

"Yes; it will at least show him how determined we are, and maybe he will draw off. If he does that, it will help us out."

Dandy Dick had closed his grip a little on the arm of his companion, to prevent him from speaking, as he feared he might do, hearing that Yang Kee was dead."

"And if he leaves us alone till to-morrow night, then we can bid him defiance, for he will be in our power. The strength he displayed in the saloon at Imperial to-night has sealed his fate."

It was plain that these men had means of knowing what went on at Imperial City.

"But, the business that brought us here—how about that?"

"We will attend to it just the same as though these infernal words had not been found," declared the leader. "If it is true that Dick Darrel has marked us, let us be all the more certain to get in the first blow."

"That we must do."

"Very well; to-morrow night we come here with the prisoner, and whether we can detect him or not, he must die. Dick Darrel fooled us once this way, but he'll never have the chance again."

"And after that—what?"

"After that we can run things our own way again. Dick Darrel is the only man we have ever had reason to fear."

"And the two women?"

"We can't be sure of them. I can't think they are Dick's former allies, for they are too young; but they may be in his scheme somewhere, and we must make sure of them somehow."

"We can attend to them afterwards."

"Yes; for they can know nothing of this until too late."

"And when it is too late, then perhaps we can induce them to remain here for good. Women are the spoils of war, you know; or used to be, at any rate."

"You have a long head. But, let us have the full plan for to-morrow night."

"Well, are we all agreed as to who Dick Darrel is, or rather—who is Dick Darrel?"

"We are!" all responded.

"Then the rest is plain. To-morrow night, about this hour, we bring him to this spot to put him to death."

"Who of us will take him?"

"Number Two, Number Five and Number Six."

"Good enough. He shall be here, never fear."

"That is all," said the leader; "but before we go I want to give you some further proof."

"What is it?"

"Proof that this man is Darrel. Here is something I want to read to you, the reason I ordered light. Listen:"

"To MR. TEABERRY:—

"You are in danger here at Imperial City. You are mistaken for another person, who has enemies here who seek his life. Be on your guard every moment, if you remain; but it will be safer for you to get away. I have done my duty in warning you. Look out for yourself. Signed,

"THE OTHER FELLOW."

"What does that mean?" cried one of the Six.

"Can't you guess?"

"No; explain."

"You noticed that it is addressed to Teaberry. Well, I found it in a corner of his room, all torn up to bits."

"The deuce you did! Then isn't he Darrel after all? What do you make of it, anyhow?"

"How thick your head must be. It's only a ruse to add strength to his disguise, to be sure."

"But, how?"

"Why; it's in his own handwriting. He has written it and then cast it into the corner as a bait for prying noses. He wants us to think Darrel has warned him, and so strengthen the idea in our mind that he can't be Darrel."

"Number One, you ought to be a detective yourself!" averred one of the band.

Dandy Dick's Dragnet.

"Oh, it doesn't take a man of heavy brain to be a detective; all it requires is a little ready wit."

"You reasoned that out well, anyhow."

"I think so. You see, if this had been a note received by Teaberry, and he were what he claims to be, he would never have cast it into a corner so, but would have put it out of the way for good and all."

"That's so."

"On the other hand, wanting to use it as he did, that was the natural thing for him to do. This piecing old letters and scraps of writing together is an old thing, and he knew it would be done if the scraps were found by any one who came prying around."

"That's so, that's so."

"But he overreached himself badly this time. Still, we had all the proof we needed without anything of this sort."

"There was sense in it, just the same."

"Yes: but he didn't reckon on the kind of material he was fighting against in the Invisible Seven."

"And yet he has branded us, every one, as a marked man."

This caused a moment of silence.

"That is what I can't understand," the leader declared.

"It is as good as a warning to us, however, and at the first alarm it must be war to the knife."

"You say aright. At the first move, it must be death to Dick Darrel. You can swear it was in self-defense, and the rest of us will stand by you, whoever it is that kills him."

There were further plannings, but little of importance was brought out, and at last they were done.

The torch was put out, they were heard moving about for a few moments, then their steps died away in the distance, and all was still.

CHAPTER XIV.

WAKING UP THE CAMP.

DANDY DICK and Ham waited a considerable time before either spoke.

Ham wished for Dick to break the silence, since he was the master spirit.

Presently Dick whispered:

"Well, I guess it will be safe for us to get down now, Ham. They seem to have all gone, and if they haven't it will be as unpleasant for them as it will for us, I guess."

"Right you be," answered Ham. "Darn their pizen hides, I'll be glad ter see 'em scooped in. Don't reckon I kin look 'em in ther face any more, 'thout givin' away that I am onto their game."

"You must guard against that, Ham."

"Oh, I will, in course; but, it won't be no easy thing ter do."

"Well, let's get down and away from here. I am afraid dark work has been going on at Imperial."

"What makes yer think so?"

"Didn't you notice what they said about Yang Kee?"

"That's so, b'gosh! Do yer s'pose they have really done fer him?"

"No; but they have done for somebody, as you call it. You heard them say Yank has been dealt with."

"Yes; dast 'em! I hope it ain't so, fer that Chinee ar' wu'th a dozen of 'em. But, then yer thinks he ar' safe. Who is it they has fixed off?"

"It must be that Chinaman who was with the young ladies. They have been taking him to be Yank there at Imperial, you know."

"I hope it ain't so; but let's slope."

"Yes; we have no further business here just now. Did you recognize any of the voices?"

"Yes; dast 'em!"

"You can believe what I told you, then?"

"You bet I kin. There'll be a big time when you make yer haul, b'gosh!"

"I rather think there will. Move carefully, now, till you get hold of the rope. Are you all right?"

In a moment more Ham responded that he was, and swung off and descended.

Dick followed close after, and was soon down.

Putting the rope well back, so that it would be out of sight by daylight, and not likely to be discovered without close looking, Dick and his companion set out upon the return to the camp.

"One thing I want to ask ye," spoke Ham, presently.

"And what is that?" asked Dick.

"How them 'ar letters kem on ther gowns of ther villains?"

"That was the clever work of Yang Kee, Ham. That fellow is a very imp for secret work."

"I should say so."

"And he is soon to undertake something even more difficult than that. You will know what I mean to-morrow night."

"He's nobody's fool, that 'ar sartain. I don't see how he done it, an' that is ther truth."

"Nor I, scarcely. It was not important in itself, and yet it was, too; but the main idea was to prepare him for this other I mention."

"I see, sez ther blind man."

"Believing that I have detected them, and that proof ought to be evidence enough, they will be all the more determined to put me out of the way."

"Yas; and ther goodness help Old Teaberry, for they seem ter have their eyes sot on him, bad."

"I am making every circumstance play into my hands, as well as I can. They will bring him here to-morrow night, for the purpose of killing him, provided they can get him without getting the worst of it. I have an idea that he is more than he seems."

"Yer would 'a' thort so, if yer had been in the Primrose ter-night."

"Why, what was going on there?"

"Teaberry took Big Ben an' stood him on his head."

"Ha! is that so? There is more to this than I thought, perhaps. I must see about this Teaberry a little."

"Yas; an' Ben was sure it must be you, then, an' he wilted right down, though he made a show of gettin' out of it easy. He was glad ter stop, I tell yer."

They continued their talk as they proceeded cautiously up the ravine, and in due time were once more out in the valley where the neat little city of Imperial nestled.

Here they paused and observed yet more caution. It would not do, now, to let the Invisibles suspect that they had been shadowed.

Not a sound was to be heard, and nothing could be seen moving, so they proceeded cautiously forward, now in silence.

They did not pause again till they came to Ham's cabin, having kept in the deeper shadows all the way.

"An' whar ar' you goin' now?" asked Ham.

"Back to join my allies."

"Yer wants ter be mighty keerful."

"Be assured of that, Ham. First, though, I'm going to nose around a little to see if I can find out what has been going on."

"Don't yer want me along?"

"You had better keep out of it, Ham. If discovered, you would have to answer unpleasant questions. That is to say, inconvenient ones."

"Yas, that's so; but, what if you is diskivered?"

"I'll elude them, somehow. If I discover anything, I'll alarm the camp, and then you can come out with the crowd."

"All right; but take keer!"

They spoke good-night, and Dick Darrel was gone.

Ham did not enter his cabin at once, but stood outside by the door waiting and listening.

"He ar' a dandy, an' no discount on him," he muttered to himself. "I'd hate ter be a doer of evil, an' have him git after me, b'gosh!"

Keeping well in the shadows, Dandy Dick had gone on in the direction of the public Square, and was soon there, when he went forward in the direction of the forum and the gallows-tree.

If any infamous deed had been done, it was here he would find evidence of it.

Not neglecting for a moment to use all caution, he was soon under the tree. All was dark, and he was debating whether to make a light or not, when something struck him.

Not in a figurative sense, but he was struck in fact. He was moving forward toward the platform, when some object struck his breast.

A weapon was in his hand in the same second as he stopped short, to listen, and as he stood thus he was struck again, this time with less force, and the object remained.

It was too dark to see, there under the tree, and he put out a hand to feel.

The thing that had hit him was a human foot, and that foot was attached to a body that was only too evidently suspended from a limb of the tree!

"A hanging!" Dick exclaimed, under his breath.

He felt at the foot, and found that it was that of a Chinaman, the peculiar shoe telling him that.

"And a Chinaman, too," he added, "but not Yank. He has on American foot-gear at

present, while these are felt clogs. It must be the girls' Celestial."

Taking the risk, he struck a match, and when it had blazed up, took a survey of the swaying body.

It was that of a Chinaman, and he recognized the poor devil as the one who had been with the two young ladies at the hotel.

"Poor Hop!" he muttered. "He met a hard fate when he was innocent. But, I am glad it was not Yank. Ha! what is this pinned on his breast?"

Lighting another match before the first was out, he held it higher and read these words:

"WARNING TO DICK DARREL!

"Here is your Chinese ally. Take warning by his fate and get out. We know you now beyond mistake, and if you are here twenty-four hours longer, the same fate will be yours."

"INVISIBLE SEVEN."

"They will find I don't scare," muttered Dick, as his match went out, and he was left in the dark.

"Fools that they are, they are too smart in their own conceit to be smart enough in point of fact. I have them on the hip now!"

Considering for a minute or so, he turned and went boldly out into the middle of the Square, and there, firing his revolvers, he began to shout and whoop wildly.

"Come out hyar, ye more-dead-'n'-alive pilgrims, ye! Jump inter yer boots an' prance right our hyar! Thar's evil doin's goin' on while yer sleep, an' yer wants ter take a hand in. Hustle, I'm shoutin', or I'll shout hyar till daylight! Whoo-oo-ooo!"

Windows and doors were heard immediately, lights were soon appearing, and other voices broke the stillness of the night. And Dick shouting and firing again, soon had the whole camp astir, or nearly so. And then, when all was excitement, Dick slipped quietly away in the darkness.

CHAPTER XV.

FINDING THE CHINAMAN.

In a brief time men were pouring into the Square from every direction—coming in every state of dress and undress, and some brought lights of one kind and another.

And as they came the eager demand was to know what had happened, who had called them forth at such an hour, and what it meant anyhow.

Nearly all the windows of the hotel were up, the doors were all open, and a good many of the inmates had already rushed out to learn the cause of the unusual excitement.

Among these were the proprietor of the house, Sinclair Fowley; Gold-plate George, and others; most of them all dressed, in spite of the haste with which they had responded to the shouting and firing in the street.

"What is the meaning of all this?" demanded the marshal, as he pushed to the front.

"Durn us if anybody seems ter know what's ther matter," somebody answered.

"Who was it firing and shouting so?"

"Jest what we all wants ter know."

"Call upon the fellow to show himself and explain," suggested Fowley.

The marshal acted upon it.

"You fellow, whoever you are," he called out, "step out and show yourself and let us know what all your noise was about."

"Nary a one of us seems ter be ther galoot," said one fellow, after a moment of waiting.

"Well, somebody made a deuce of a racket, that is certain," the marshal declared, "and if he did it to fool us he'd ought to be booted."

At that moment came a cry from the direction of the tree.

Some men hurrying into the Square from that direction had run against the feet of the suspended Celestial.

"Who hev yer been a-hangin' hyar?" one called out.

"Whar—what?" was the shout.

"Why, hyar on ther tree, o' course! Who ar' it?"

There was a shout at once, and a great rush was made for the tree.

Lights were in demand, and those who held them made haste with the rest of the crowd.

Others made haste to procure torches from any convenient source, and the light about the Square was growing brighter each moment.

"It ar' a Chinee!" was shortly made known.

"A Chinaman!" echoed the marshal, pushing to the front.

"That's what it ar'," was affirmed.

Snatching a light from the hand of a man

near him, Gold-plate pushed through to the place where the body was hanging.

True enough, there hung a Chinaman, evidently quite dead, and on his breast was some sort of notice or placard.

"Be he dead?" was demanded.

"I'm afraid he is," answered the marshal.

"Le's cut him down an' see."

"Yes; cut him down as quick as you can," Gold-plate directed. "There may be a spark of life in the poor devil yet."

The other end of the rope was speedily found, and a knife quickly applied to it, when the body of the Celestial came to the ground in a limp heap.

"Dead as a nail," said the marshal, sadly.

"An' what's that writin' on him, Goldy?" was inquired.

"Just what I want to see," was the answer. "Stand back, some of you!"

Some of the nearer ones fell back a little, and others took hold of the dead man and laid him out straight.

There was no question about his being dead now, for he was not only so, but cold, though not yet rigid.

"It's Yang Kee, sure!" cried the marshal.

"What do it say?"

Gold-plate read the notice out aloud for the benefit of the crowd.

"Warnin' ter Darrel!"

"Ther Invisibles ergain!"

"He'd better dust out while he kin!"

"Cuss ther Invisibles! A pity we couldn't hang them!"

These cries and many more of the like were heard on every hand, and the crowd grew larger each moment.

"What are we going to do?" asked Sinclair Fowley.

"Don't see that we can do anything to-night," answered the marshal.

"These villains ought to be hunted down and severely dealt with. This sort of thing won't do."

"We all agree with you, Mr. Fowley, but how can you get hold of invisible foes? You show them to me, and see how quick I'll deal with them."

"Yes; an' hyar, too," cried Ham Stanton, who had just come up.

And there were many more who echoed the same sentiment, but that was all it amounted to.

"Then these outlaws believe this is really Yang Kee, do they?" spoke Sinclair Fowley.

"Yes; and I imagine they know what they are doing," answered Gold-plate.

"And if so, then Darrel is in danger."

"As you see by this notice."

"Bnt, is it Yang Kee?"

It was Simon Slow who raised the doubt.

"Don't it look enough like him?" demanded the marshal.

"It looks like him, yas; but that don't make it him. It's ther ladies' servent, ain't it?"

"Yas; but we all believes it ar' Yang Kee," another made response to that.

"I'm one that don't believe it, then," Ham Stanton spoke.

"You're always on the other side," sneered Fowley.

"I'm allus on ther right side, anyhow," Ham retorted, "an' ther right gen'lly comes out on top in ther end."

"What do you mean?"

"No more'n what I say."

"And the less you say the better for you."

"I had ther idee that this hyar was a free country, an' a feller could say about what he pleased," Ham growled.

"So long as his betters are pleased to let him."

"Thunderation! Do you mean ter call your self ther betters o' me?" Ham demanded, hotly.

"You can take it to yourself if it fits you," was the answer.

Ham was about taking another step forward, but did not, drawing back instead.

"If you had said that half a dozen hours sooner," he grumbled, "I'd a' sent ye to ther ground half killed."

"You are welcome to try it, if you want to, sir," invited Fowley.

"No; not now."

"What's the difference of a few hours?"

"I know more than I did a while ago, that's all," was Ham's answer.

The mine-manager looked after him, his face white and red by turns, and made no further remark.

Perhaps it was a word from Gold-plate George that had checked him.

Anyhow, there the matter ended.

Such a thing as this, a quarrel between such

men as Fowley and Ham Stanton, had drawn attention from the other matter at once.

Now that it was over, though, attention was again turned to the dead Chinee.

"What is goin' ter be done wi' him, marshal?" was asked.

"You'll have to take him to the hotel," was the answer. "That's where he belongs, I suppose. I don't see what took him out at night."

"Don't ther note tell plain enough what it was?" demanded Ham Stanton, who had turned back again.

"What do you mean now?"

"It must ha' been ther Invisibles, that's what I mean."

"That hanged him, yes; but they could never have got him out of the hotel if he hadn't gone willingly. The house would have been alarmed."

This view was accepted by the most of the crowd at once.

"We kin think as we please about that," growled Ham, "unless ther's a law hyar against thinkin', too."

"I don't want any words with you, Stanton," Gold-plate waived. "You are evidently in a bad humor to-night. Come, boys, pick the poor fellow up and bring him along."

The body of the Chinaman was taken up and carried in the direction of the hotel, the crowd following.

By this time everybody in the house was up, and the Gobles, the Misses Silverton, and Phineas Teaberry, were on the piazza.

As the first of the crowd neared the house, they questioned as to what had taken place, and were informed that it was "only a hanged Chinee."

At this the two young women were interested at once, and ran down the steps and forward to meet the men who were bearing the body that way; and as their eyes fell upon the face of the dead Celestial, both uttered cries of grief.

Phineas Teaberry had followed them, perhaps out of curiosity, and he, too, appeared moved by what he saw.

CHAPTER XVI.

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS.

"OH! men, what have you done?" cried Mable Silverton, at sight of her dead servant.

"It wasn't us what done it, ma'm," responded one of the foremost of the wild crowd. "It was ther Invisibles what did it. They hanged him, an' we has just cut ther pore cuss down."

"Poor Hop Wah!" sighed Grace.

"This is really too bad, ladies," said Gold-plate George. "It appears that the outlaws have hanged him for Yang Kee."

"But he was not that person, sir; we know that, well enough."

"Then it is a most remarkable resemblance. But, the outlaws could not know that, of course."

"How did they get him? He was in the hotel asleep, was he not?"

"We cannot answer that, not knowing. In some way he must have been enticed out of doors."

"Poor Hop! You will avenge his death, will you not, marshal?"

"I will try to. I faithfully promise you that," was the response.

"And what will you do with the body?"

"Whatever you say, madam."

"Well, bring it in and lay it out decently, and to-morrow it must be buried. Poor Hop! the most faithful servent we ever had."

The ladies did not shed any tears, but evidently felt bad enough over their loss, that kind of sorrow one might feel over the loss of a pet animal.

The body was carried into the hall and laid out on a table there, and after a time the crowd broke up and gradually the house and the street became quiet once more.

On the following morning the Chinaman was buried, Reverend Bray doing the proper thing in the way of a funeral service.

It was while the funeral service was going on that Mr. Teaberry, on the piazza of the hotel, accosted Mr. Fowley on the matter of insurance again.

"Well, sir," he opened, "how about it?"

"How about what?" Fowley inquired.

"Insurance, of course."

Mr. Fowley laughed heartily.

"That seems to be the only idea you have at command," he said.

"That is where my bread and butter lie, sir," was the response to that.

"How much longer do you think you can impose upon me, my man?"

"Impose upon you, sir? I don't know what you mean?"

"You almost make me disgusted with your attempt."

"Mr. Fowley, you will have to make yourself clearer, if you want me to understand you. Do you think my insurance is not good?"

"I think it is all a farce, that's what I think of it."

"And why? What proof have you for that? The company I represent is certainly a solid one."

"What took place over there in the saloon last night?"

"Why, I merely had a little frolic with the boys, to make myself solid with them."

"You did more than that. You took Big Ben and stood him on his head, did you not?"

"Oh, no; I merely shoved him away from me when he was going to do desperate things with my person, that was all."

"Well, whatever it was, there was only one man that could have done it, and that was Dick Darrel. You are that man, and what is the use of denying it?"

"Ha! ha! Still harping on the old string, eh? My dear sir, how am I going to convince you of your error?"

"You can't do it. You're Dick Darrel and nobody else. Not that I care anything about it, I'm not going to mention it; but I hate to see you so conceited that you think nobody can see anything."

"Then I may as well own up, I suppose."

"Of course you had," cried Fowley, with eager interest.

"Well, I would, if you were right, but you're wrong. I am not Dick Darrel."

"I know better."

"Then there is no use talking about it any further."

"Why can't you trust me? I won't give it away, if you want to keep on playing your present character; but I do hate to be made a part of your scheme."

"How made a part?"

"By being eternally pestered about insurance."

"I see that it is of no use for me to say anything further to you on that line, then."

"Not a bit of use. You may as well give it up."

"Very well, I won't trouble you any more. Ah! here comes Mr. Gobles; I must tackle him once more."

With a smile as of contempt, Mr. Fowley moved away, as Mr. Gobles came up.

"And how is it with you?" Teaberry greeted.

"Oh, as usual," was the response. "I have received no tidings yet."

"Too bad. I hope the lost will soon be found. But, how about insurance? I am eager to write your policy."

"Do you know, sir, dear Hannah and I have been talking about that very thing. We think your suggestion a grand one, and as soon as dear Simeon has been—"

"It is folly to wait, sir. Life is too uncertain. If your son is found, as I feel sure he will be, it will be all right, and should the worst be learned, then it will be easy to transfer it to some one else who is deserving."

"But, the uncertainty of it all—"

"No matter, no matter. If you will come to my room with me I will tell you all about it, from beginning to end, outside and in."

"Well, I don't mind; but I can't say that I'll take it out yet, you know. I will go up with you, as I want to talk with you a little in private anyhow."

"Ah! if that is the case, come right along."

Teaberry rose and entered the house, Gobles following, and they were soon in Teaberry's room.

What was said, behind that closed door, we will not now reveal. Let it suffice to say that insurance was not the subject of conversation.

It was that night, at supper, that Gideon Gobles entered the room a little late, his face wearing a smile that no one had seen on it before, and he appeared to be happy.

"Why, what's the good word, Mr. Gobles?" inquired Mr. Fowley.

"The lost is found!" was the response.

"What, you have found your boy?"

"We have heard from him, sir."

"Ha! I am glad to hear it. Where is he?"

"At a place called Bowlder Canyon."

"That is twenty miles from here. How did you hear about it?"

"You remember I told you I had sent out letters of inquiry."

"Yes."

"Well, one was sent to that place, and a messenger from there has brought me the information."

"Good for you!" Fowley exclaimed. "Now I presume the fatted calf will have to suffer, since the prodigal is coming."

"I will be willing to kill two fatted calves, if my boy is found in good health and strength."

"Indeed, yes!" echoed Mrs. Gobles.

"And now for that insurance, eh?" hinted Mr. Teaberry.

"Yes; I think we will arrange that, as soon as Simeon comes," Gobles responded.

Fowley looked a look of disgust at Teaberry, and he and George Pierre exchanged a glance.

The talk was lively all around till the meal was drawn to a close.

As some were about to rise, Gobles remarked:

"Pray remain seated, gentlemen. When the ladies have retired I desire to have you drink to the health of my son in a bottle of the best the house affords."

"You want us to rejoice with you, eh?" laughed Fowley.

"Yes; if you put it that way. I am the happiest man in this country to-night, and I want to give you a share of it, if I can. If not, then at least I want to make this an occasion to be remembered."

"We'll oblige you, of course," said Gold-plate George.

"Thank you, my friends. Tom," to the Chinaman at his back, "go to the bar and get half a dozen of the best wine to be had, regardless of cost, and bring them here and serve."

The Celestial grinned and was off at once, while Mr. Gobles went on to tell the company what an expert Tom Lee was at preparing drinks for such an occasion. He was, he felt free to declare, the best hand at that sort of thing he had ever known.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FINISHING TOUCHES.

In a few moments the Celestial returned. He had the bottles in his arms, and was grinning as ever.

Going to a sideboard, he deposited the bottles there while he procured the necessary glasses.

In this the waiter came to his assistance, and selecting as many glasses as there were noses present, including his own, the Chinaman set about serving.

Mr. Fowley and Marshal Pierre were waited upon first, and then the others in order, Tom Lee moving about easily and rapidly as though accustomed to that sort of thing.

The last to be served was Mr. Gobles, and after him the Chinaman proceeded to treat himself.

He evidently considered Jack as good as his master.

The first glass having been served, the bottles were put on the table within the reach of all.

The treat was heartily partaken of, to the evident pleasure and satisfaction of Mr. Gobles, and toasts of various sorts were offered.

"Now, last of all," Gideon finally remarked, "a toast from me."

"To be sure," was the approving shout. "Let it be health and wealth to the prodigal."

"No, no!" Gideon disputed. "That has been toasted enough. Here is to the Invisible Seven! May they soon be put where dogs won't bite 'em!"

This provoked a laugh, and the toast was heartily responded to, and that ended the modest little dip into dissipation for which Mr. Gobles stood responsible, and the participants went out.

As they went from the room, Mr. Teaberry touched Mr. Fowley on the arm.

"Insurance again?" Mr. Fowley demanded, shortly.

"No; not insurance this time," was the smiling answer. "I see it is of no use to push that further with you. I want to talk with you in private about another matter."

"What is it?"

"You still suspect my identity?"

"Of course I do; and not only that, but I know you are Darrel."

"Very well, I will have to admit it to you, quietly. Will you come to my room and sit down while we talk?"

A look of keenest satisfaction appeared on the face of the hotel proprietor and mine-manager, as he answered that he would gladly go with his guest.

"I thought you would see the folly of holding out against me," he remarked, boastfully.

"Yes; it was foolishness, of course; but I wanted to be sure that you were not bluffing, you know. You will not let on?"

"Oh, no; of course not; you can trust me for that."

Teaberry led the way up to his room, and gave his host the best chair the room afforded.

Taking another himself then, and sitting with his back to the window, the fading light falling full upon Fowley, he opened the conversation.

"Now, Mr. Fowley, since you have forced me to reveal myself to you, I am going to take you into my confidence and ask you to help me on a certain matter."

"As it will give me pleasure to do," Fowley made answer. "You may repose all confidence in me, and I will serve you as well as I can."

"I have no doubt of that. Now, the general idea seems to be that I am here to hunt down the Invisible Seven."

"As of course you are; you will have to admit that."

"Well, let us agree on that point, to please you; but I care less about the Invisibles than about something else."

"It is rather hard to believe that, sir."

"Still it is the truth."

"Then what is that something else?"

"It is concerning that I am about to speak. I need help, and you seem to be the man best fitted to give it."

"Well, let me hear."

"The story is short. Some years ago, in San Francisco, lived a wealthy man named James Steelton, who died rather suddenly, of heart failure it was said."

Something had come over Mr. Fowley. He was pale to the lips; he had started at the name, and was now staring at the other as in horror.

Teaberry appeared to take no notice whatever of this agitation, but went on with the story he had set out to tell, keeping his eyes on the man's face.

"This Steelton left a big fortune, and two daughters, but no will. The fortune naturally went to the children, or would so have gone, had not somebody else taken it."

"Shortly after the death of Steelton, a former partner in business, one Howard Rondleigh, came down upon the property, with evidences of debt that took almost everything, and he got all but a mere trifle out of the estate."

Mr. Fowley's agitation was greater than ever, yet Teaberry still pretended not to notice it.

"Rondleigh disappeared," the narrator went on, "and was not heard of again. Now it has been discovered that his claim was a fraud, and that he simply robbed those innocent children of their property. I have been engaged to lock him up, but I confess to you that I'm stumped."

"And what in the world has brought you away off here?" Fowley managed to ask in pretty firm voice, having somewhat recovered.

"Well, I did strike a clew that led this way, but it seems to have petered out, and here I am. Now, I want to ask you if you ever heard of a man of that name in these parts?"

"I never did, sir."

"But then it is not likely that he would use his own name. Here is a photograph of him as he was when a young man. Of course we would look for great changes by this time."

Fowley had paled again, and his hand was nervous as he received the card.

He looked at it intently for a moment, and handed it back.

"Never saw that face, I'm sure," he declared.

"I was in hopes you had. I hate to give up a case like this, for there is money in it, if I can only find my man."

"Wish I could help you, but I'm afraid I can't. Have you asked any one else about it?"

"No; for you know I have been keeping close. In case you should see any one you think will fill the bill, will you let me know, Mr. Fowley?"

"Why, to be sure."

Fowley had now begun to recover, and was almost himself.

It must have appeared strange to him that his recent agitation had not been noticed. Nothing in the look or manner of the man before him gave evidence that it had been, however, and he no doubt flattered himself that he had controlled his emotions so well.

There was some further talk, and it was growing dark when Mr. Fowley took his leave.

No sooner had the door closed after him than that grim smile appeared on the face of Mr. Teaberry.

Fowley went at once to the bar-room, where he found Gold-plate George.

He drew aside immediately, and said:

"Well, we were right."

"In what?"

"The man is Darrel!"

"We were sure of that, I thought."

"Yes; but he has now admitted it to me, privately."

"Good! I thought it would be strange if he could fool us a third time."

And they took seats and discussed the situation, whatever their interest in it was, for some time.

Meanwhile, about as soon as it was dark, Ham Stanton had gone out of the camp in the direction of the glade in the wood near the dark pool.

Nor was he alone, for Simon Slow and a number of others followed him, each one moving in silence, and no word was spoken by any of them until their destination was reached.

At the hotel everything was as usual, the Gobles were on the piazza till their usual hour of retiring, when they went to their room.

The young ladies, the Misses Silverton, had already retired, and it was not long before Mr. Teaberry followed the example set by the others.

But strange things were taking place.

To mention one, a Chinaman had descended from a window on the dark side of the hotel.

Touching the ground, he cast off the rope and it was quickly drawn up and the Chinaman glided away in the darkness.

To follow him were needless, since it is to be revealed presently what he did, but upon him depended in a great measure the success of what was to follow.

That Chinaman, needless to say, was the wily Yang Kee.

The dragnet was about ready for the haul.

CHAPTER XVII.

UNDER COVER OF NIGHT.

THE hour was late, when, under the window from which the Chinaman had made his exit, the plaintive wail of a cat was heard.

It was repeated two or three times; then the faint chirp of a cricket responded, after which the call was heard a single time and then no more.

Soon after a rope wiggled silently down the side of the house, a dark shadow laid hold upon it as soon as it came within reach from the ground, and a slight jerk was given on it.

For some moments then nothing was seen or heard, and the rope hung still and idle.

Presently the rope was violently disturbed, and continued to move restlessly as a dark form came down it from a window above.

It was the form of a man, and as soon as he was safely on the ground the cat-call was given once again, faintly, and again was the rope disturbed and set in motion.

Another shadowy form was presently discerned in the darkness, coming rapidly downward, and soon another person had joined the two, making three who stood there in the intense shadow close to the house.

A brief consultation was held, after which two of the persons vanished into the night, the other ascending the rope and drawing it up after him.

Some minutes later a light tapping was heard on the door of the room occupied by Mr. Phineas Teaberry.

The key was heard to turn in the lock immediately, and a man was admitted into the room.

The door was again closed, the key turned, and the two men talked in whispers.

No light was in the room, and the men could not see each other.

Presently Teaberry groped his way to a closet, leading his visitor by the arm, and the visitor entered.

Teaberry pushed the door shut to within about half an inch, and after a few more whispered words turned away and felt his way to the bed.

Into the bed he got, and in a moment more was snoring away as though he had not been awake within the hour.

Strange proceedings these.

What was coming?

It was an hour later, perhaps more, when a grating, rasping sound was heard at the door.

This continued for a moment, the noise being low, and evidently made no louder than was possible to help.

The opening of the door followed, and soft steps glided into the room as silently, almost, as ghosts are supposed to tread.

As silently the door was closed after them, and for some moments no further sound was heard save the regular snoring of the man who occupied the bed.

After a few moments a light was made, the flame of a match dispelling the darkness with magic power.

There, before the bed, to the watching eyes of the man in the closet, were disclosed three figures in white flowing gowns and cowls.

When the match had blazed up it was applied to a candle held by one of the three, and that having taken the light, two of the invaders drew weapons and advanced to the bed.

The man in the closet had revolvers in hand, ready to use them if need be.

When the two had stepped to the side of the bed close enough to touch the sleeper, one of them shook him to wake him up.

Teaberry stopped snoring, opened his eyes lazily, and then suddenly sat bolt upright in the bed, staring wildly about him in a most bewildered fashion.

"Make the least noise," he was warned, in whisper, "and you are a dead man!"

"Wh—wh—what does this mean?" Teaberry gasped.

"It means that you are in the power of the Invisibles," was the hissed reply. "The least resistance will mean death swift and sure."

"Good heavens!" Teaberry gasped, his teeth fairly chattering in his terror, "what have I done to you, good gentlemen, that you threaten me thus? I have done no harm to any man."

"Silence!" was the order. "This is no time or place for argument or explanation. Get up and dress yourself. And mind, the first move you make that looks like fight, down you will go. We mean it, every time."

"Oh, I'll do anything, good men, if you will only spare my life," Teaberry tremblingly promised, as he slipped out of bed.

As he got out, it was noticed that two revolvers had been his sleeping companions.

"Ha! see these!" whispered one of the trio, pointing to them.

"He's our man," said another.

"Sure!"

"But we got the bulge on him, coming in still as we did, or he would have drilled us."

Little they imagined that their man had not been asleep at all, and that the weapons had been firmly in his grasp till their intentions became clear.

Mr. Teaberry was dressing himself as hastily as he could for his trembling, one of the men holding him covered with his revolvers the while, and the one with the candle lighting the scene.

He with the candle was standing far enough back to admit of no chance for the prisoner to blow the light out.

No more was said till Teaberry had completed his dressing.

As he finished by putting on his hat, he asked:

"What are you going to do with me, good friends?"

"Nothing, at present," was the response. "You must come with us."

"Where to?"

"That need not matter. If you can prove that you are not Dick Darrel, no harm will come to you."

"And what if I am Dick Darrel?"

"In that case we will deal with you accordingly."

"Well, I will go with you. Lead the way, and spare me if you find me not to be the one you suspect I am."

"Yes, we'll lead the way; but first, you must be secured. Now it will be of no use your offering resistance, for we will take you or kill you, one or the other."

A look of added fear had come upon the prisoner's face, calling forth that threat.

One of the trio having put away his revolvers, now set about binding the prisoner securely.

Having bound the man's hands behind his back, he next gagged him and put a blindfold over his eyes.

"There, now he is ready," he announced.

"And we will be off with him," added the leader.

"Yes; and the sooner the better," spoke the one who held the candle. "I have never been so infernal sleepy in my life."

"It's the same with me," responded the leader. "The night air will open our eyes for us. Put out your light now, take off the white, and let us be off."

The light was put out immediately, and after a little further delay, during which the prisoner was warned against making the least noise in leaving the house, they left the room.

The prisoner, by the way, had not been allowed to put on his boots yet, and carried them suspended by a string over his shoulders. The others had padding on their feet, so that their steps could not be heard.

Only a moment had they left the room when

the man from the closet came forth with caution. Feeling his way to the bed he secured the two revolvers belonging to Teaberry, and having put them in his pockets, felt his way out of the room.

The others were by this time in the hall below, and by listening carefully he could hear the shuffling of their feet toward the rear door, which they soon opened to pass out.

The watcher descended, swiftly but silently, and was out of the house only a moment behind the others. He could barely discern them as they moved away in the darkness, and followed.

When they had cleared the camp the knaves paused to allow Teaberry to put on his boots. That done, they moved on up the valley, out through the narrow pass, and on down into the dismal ravine.

The follower crept after them, with all the caution of an experienced scout, with no more noise than a careful cat might make.

On and still on, deeper and deeper into the wood, until at last they came to the pool in the woody glade, where they stopped, their shadower with them.

There was a brief silence.

"Are all assembled?" spoke a voice.

"All are here," was answered.

"Your numbers."

There were five to respond, making six in all.

"It is well," spoke the captain of the band.

"Don now the white, for light is necessary."

In the darkness they put on their white gowns and cowls, the man who had followed them doing the same. The light would reveal them seven instead of six.

CHAPTER XIX.

DRAWING THE DRAGNET.

"ARE all ready now?" the captain presently asked.

And the responses being all affirmative, he added:

"Then let us have light and be done with this business. One torch will be enough."

A pause of a moment and then light was struck, burning dimly at first but getting brighter each second till the torch blazed full.

That there were seven of these white-robed figures none seemed to notice. No thought was there that more than six could be present, and none took pains to count their number.

Within their circle stood their prisoner, two of their number holding him secure against escape.

"Let's make short work of the fellow, Number One," spoke one of the band. "I am getting too infernally sleepy to stand up."

"And so am I," put in another.

"And here, too."

"I am not far behind the rest of you," the captain declared. "I am as stupid as an owl. Yes; I'll make short work of it, and we'll get back."

Then to the prisoner:

"Well, do you own up that you are Dick Darrel?"

"No; I do not," was the answer.

Teaberry seemed to have recovered his nerve. Crickets were chirping all around them, at intervals.

"You still stubbornly deny it, eh?"

"I can't admit what isn't so. I'm not Dick Darrel."

"Can you prove that you are not?"

"Certainly I can!"

"Very well, give us the proof."

"It would not be of any use. You have made up your minds to kill me anyhow."

"No; if you can prove that you are not Darrel, and convince us of the fact, we will let you go."

"But if the proof don't satisfy you, what then?"

"You shall die."

"How?"

"We intend to tie a stone to you, throw you into this pool, and then roll other stones in on top of you."

"That's not a very inviting end, I declare. I prefer to give you proof that will satisfy you."

"Well, be about it, that's all."

"What if I call upon Dick Darrel to show himself?"

"Ha! ha! I think your call would be in vain, my friend, unless you respond to it yourself. We know you are Darrel."

"Then you would not believe it, even were Darrel to appear?"

"No; confound you! We'd kill you both and

so make doubly sure. We intend to kill you anyhow, but wanted to be sure of our game if we could."

"Oh, well, if that is the case, go ahead! It were useless to present proof under such circumstances. Still, you may find out your mistake before you are done with me."

"Make ready, men, and let's have it done with."

"Yes; have it over with," urged Teaberry, "for I can see you are getting drowsy. You are seven to one, but—"

"Seven?" exclaimed the captain, bracing up and looking about him.

"Yes; if I can count straight, seven you are!" said Teaberry.

"Thunder?" the captain ejaculated, as he counted six besides himself. "How is this, men?"

The seven looked from one to another, but of course could not make it out. That there were seven of them was evident.

"Give me your numbers," the leader ordered. They were all spoken nearly at once, and the result was confusion.

"No, no!" the excited leader cried. "One at a time, beginning at two, and so on up. Now!"

"Number Two," spoke one.

"Number Three," another.

"Number Four."

"Number Five."

"Number Six."

At that they stopped, and still there was one who had not spoken.

"And what number do you lay claim to?" the captain demanded, fiercely.

"I am Number One," was the quiet response.

"Number One! You lie! I am Number One myself."

"You have been, but I am going to dispute your right. Up with your hands, every one of you, or taste lead!"

In the same moment a great red glare flashed forth, making the scene as light as day, and on top of the first rock shelf a great quantity of red fire burned, making the light of the torch of none effect.

With his words, the seventh white-robed figure had brought his hands to the level, a gleaming revolver displayed in each.

The rascals were surprised, and with that and the terrible light together, were powerless.

At the same moment, too, steps were heard in every direction, and before the villains could recover in any measure they were seized from behind, and the tubes of revolvers were pressed behind their ears.

The dragnet had been hauled; the sharks were in it!

"What do you think of it now, my fine fellows?" asked Mr. Teaberry, a moment later.

"Am I or am I not?"

That broke the spell, and the prisoners began to struggle with their captors, cursing and raving as they did so.

"It is of no use, my gallows Six!" spoke he of the white gown and cowl, who had played the part of one of them with such excellent results.

"Who are you?" was the fierce demand.

"I am Dick Darrel, your humble servant!" was the quiet response.

"You lie!" the captain almost screamed.

"Thank you; but I speak only the truth."

"To which I am witness," supplemented Teaberry.

"Then who are you?"

"Pheas Teaberry, insurance agent, and so forth; particularly the latter."

"How like it, allee samee?" called out a Chinese voice from the top of the rock. "Yang Kee gittee in fine work dat time, you bettee!"

And with that the wily Yank stirred up his red fire and added some more to it to keep it going brightly.

He had played well his part, and had served his master better than well.

About that time one of the Six was heard to give a deep sigh, and he sunk to the ground, where, after an effort or two to rise, he rolled over and lay still.

"Ha!" cried the Chinaman from the rocky shelf, "me thought it 'bout time to bling them. They all go that way soon now, allee samee like him. Ha! ha! ha! Yang Kee gittee bulge on 'em vely bad."

"Yes, you infernal knaves," Darrel cried, "I have bagged you at last, and no escape is open to you! Within ten minutes you will all be asleep like that one, and then we will deal with you. You have been drugged. Ha! I see you start with surprise. The band that branded you could easily drug you."

By this time the prisoners had been bound

securely, still in their gowns and hoods, and were secure against escape.

"Thar yer is, cuss yer!" cried Ham Stanton, now free to speak. "Yer is the wu'st darn set o' skunks I ever sot me eyes on, an' you bet thar will be a ruction at Imperial. I reckons thar'll be a noise on thar roof when we shows ye up."

"Yas; an' I opine we'll all take a hand in it, b'gosh!" cried Simon Slow. "I have allus been a little slow, I allow, but I reckon I'll be soon enough ter come in at thar tail eend this hyer time."

Other remarks were made by the rest, and taunts of all kinds were thrown at the hapless prisoners.

One by one they gave up the struggle and succumbed to the sleep they were powerless to fight off, and ere long every one was insensible.

Meanwhile torches had been lighted, the red fire had died out, and now preparations were begun for the return to sleeping camp.

Darrel had retained his hood of white, and after some words in consultation with Ham Stanton, put matters in his charge, and in company with Mr. Teaberry, set out in advance of the others.

Ham took charge with a will, the others falling readily and willingly under his command, and ere long they were on their way back to Imperial, carrying the sleeping Invisibles with them. The end of their long rope had been reached at last.

CHAPTER XX.

THRILLING THE THRONG.

It is scarcely necessary to follow further the proceedings of that night.

A recital of the incidents of the morrow, of greater import, will sufficiently explain what had passed.

The early risers, when they made the discovery, were amazed to see an armed guard patrolling on the Square around the so-called forum.

There were a score of them at least, each with a rifle, looking very military as a whole, and Ham Stanton appeared to be the captain of the guard, or whatever it was.

The early discoverers lost no time in going forward to inquire into this odd proceeding.

"What in all ther nation hev broke loose?" one inquired.

"Ther camp is under martial reign jest now," answered Ham.

"Martial law! What do yer mean, Ham?"

"That's jest it. A Deputy U. S. Marshal hev taken charge, an' I'm his chief o' police fer ther time bein'."

"Great smokes! Ham, what does yer mean?"

"Does yer see these hyar white-robed sleepin' beauties hyar on thar flatporm?"

The early risers looked across to the place where Ham pointed, and there lay six figures in robes of white, in bonds.

"Great stirrin' hornpipes!" was the exclamation, "what is 'em?"

"Them's ther Invisible Seven, minus one," explained Ham.

From that moment the excitement began.

The announcement was greeted wsth a wild whoop that aroused the camp.

Within fifteen minutes the whole town was on the Square, with questionings innumerable and impossible to quote.

But their curiosity was not gratified yet, and they were not allowed to get within the line of armed guardsmen, and so could not gain the platform.

Some stormed greatly at this, but as none of the leading citizens, that is to say, the leading spirits, were present to push the demand, nothing could be done for the present.

In the course of an hour, or earlier, every soul in the camp, nearly, was there on the Square, even to the ladies from the hotel, as well as Mr. Teaberry.

About the last to come out were the Gobles, with their Chinese servant following them as usual.

Mr. Gobles, with his wife on his arm, pushed through to the front.

Their Chinaman still followed closely.

Some made rough objections, as they forced along, but a mild apology from the innocent Gideon had the effect to soothe the fault-finders in most cases.

The front reached, what was the surprise of the crowd when Ham Stanton gave Mr. Gobles a military salute, as nearly as he knew how; and the still greater surprise when Gobles, with wife and servant, passed through the guard and mounted the steps to the platform where the prisoners lay.

A buzz of question, surmise and comment ran through the crowd.

"What in ther merry wars be ye a-doin' up thar, Mister Gobles?" some one sung out.

"Do yer expect ter find yer lost son an' heir up thar amongst ther other white ones?"

"Come down offen thar, an' make room fer ther Marshal Gold-plate when he gits hyar."

"Citizens of Imperial City," spoke Gobles, advancing to the front edge of the platform, leaving his wife and servant a step behind, "I have a story to tell you and a disclosure to make."

He spoke in a changed voice, a voice that certainly was not that of his own, as the people had known it before.

The crowd stared at him in open-mouthed amazement, for it dawned upon them that he was not what he had seemed.

"It is my pleasure to announce to you," the speaker continued, "that the band of outlaws known to you as the Invisible Seven has been overhauled at last. Here they are, and they are my prisoners."

"Your prisoners!"

"Then who ther Nick be you?"

For answer, Gobles removed his old high hat, his long, old-fashioned coat, his cravat and gorgeous vest, and appeared in a flannel shirt under all. Then, last of all, taking off his spectacles and a false wig, he stood revealed as—Dick Darrel, the Dandy Detective!

The shout that arose was deafening, and it lasted for some minutes.

"How in ther durnation did yer do it?" one loud voice bellowed out. "Yer kem hyar as Gobles afore ye had gone away at all, an' I'll sw'ar to it!"

"That's so! That's so!" And the crowd began to whoop and yell for the explanation in a way that threatened to waken the prisoners, unless they were dead instead of sleeping.

Dick Darrel it was, there was no disputing that; and little wonder the crowd was wild for the explanation.

As soon as the noise had abated so that he could make himself heard, Dick began his story.

"It was as you have seen, my friends," he spoke. "I have taken off the disguise here before you, so that you might have the witness of your own eyes for it all. And yet, strange as it may seem to you, the explanation will show you how very simple it was, in fact.

"You remember, when I made the arrest of your former marshal, proving him the murderer of my companion and friend, Barney, I sent him away in charge of some of my allies, or assistants. How, think you, *they* had come here?

"I will tell you how. One wore this disguise you have just seen me lay off. Another, the disguise he now wears here before you," indicating the Mrs. Gobles. "And yet another in the disguise of a Chinaman. They came here and began the role you have since seen us carry out.

"When my friend Hudson here, and Yank, with myself, disappeared, where did we go? Simply from the bar-room into the hall, and up to the room of the Gobles as speedily as our legs would carry us. There I put on the disguise my helper had just laid off; Hudson resumed the one he had been wearing; while Yank simply changed himself to the former Tom Lee."

Not a man in the crowd but felt that he wanted to be kicked for not having guessed the truth of it all.

Mrs. Gobles and Tom Lee had now laid off their superfluous toggery there in the sight of all, and appeared for what they were, proving Dick's statements true in every respect.

"My object was," Dick continued, "to trap the Invisible Seven, and that object has been attained."

"But who is ther darn skunks, Dandy Dick?"

"Be patient for a moment and you shall see. I want first to call upon Mr. Phineas Teaberry to come up here and tell you something about himself, and to testify that these prisoners before you are indeed the rascals I declare them to be."

"That's me," cried Mr. Teaberry, from his place in the crowd, "and I'm right with you. Can't the ladies find room up there, out of the press of the crowd, Mr. Darrel? Yes? All right; come right this way, ladies, and you can see and hear the better. That is the idea; that's better."

The Misses Silverton had stepped forward at his invitation, and with him ascended and took places upon the platform. Teaberry stepped to the front.

"Like your friend Darrel, here, citizens," he began at once, "I am not exactly what I seem. Let me cast off some of this now useless disguise, and I'll show you just what I am."

Off came the tall hat, the long coat, the chin whisker and a wig, and there stood forth confessed as fine-looking a specimen of young manhood as need be desired. He was no more than thirty years of age, and looked a match for Darrel himself.

"My name, gentlemen," he announced, "is Steele, and I am a detective from San Francisco. I came here in the employ of these young ladies, who are hunting down a man who robbed them of their father's wealth when they were children. We have found our man."

He then told the story that has been revealed to the reader.

"Dropping their true name, Steelton," he continued, "they took the name Silverton, and that is all there is to tell about that. About the man who robbed them, however, more is to be said. I found him here, in the person of your Sinclair Fowley, who is really the rascally Rondleigh I have named.

"About the time I made sure of him, you people were making it warm for me by declaring that I was Dandy Dick Darrel. I denied it, but that did not pass with you, so at last I admitted it, to carry out another object. Darrel had guessed what I was, and revealed himself to me, taking me into his scheme with him. His scheme was to trap the Invisibles.

"These knaves were after his life, and admitting that I was he, my life was in danger. We had calculated all the risks, however, and I agreed to play the *role* to the end. Last night three of these masked men came to my room, took me prisoner—with my consent, and carried me off into the woods to hang me. There Darrel and his jewel of a Chinaman took a hand in the matter and bagged the whole game. That is all, in brief; and I can swear that these men here in white are the Invisible Seven, less one."

CHAPTER XXI.

CONCLUSION.

DANDY DICK told the rest of the story more at length than is possible now to quote. He related how he had ferreted out the members of the Invisible Seven, with the valuable aid of Yang Kee, and how he and Yank had gathered them in.

Interesting as his narrative was, the crowd could not control its curiosity to know who the Seven were—rather the six; for that disclosure had not been made, and the men were still lying bound.

"And now to satisfy your curiosit," Dick finally said, "and reveal to you who these rascals are. You observe how silent they are. They are not dead, but sleeping, thanks to the gentle art of Yang Kee. He will awaken them presently.

"Besides branding them, as I have told you, and as you will see when they get upon their feet, he last evening drugged them, every one. One or two of you will remember my treat in the dining-room last night, when Yank poured out the wine. It was then he gave two their dose."

"In ther dinin'-room of ther hotel?" was exclaimed.

"Yes, exactly."

"Then who in wonders be they?"

"Look well about you, citizens, and see who is missing."

"Ther marshal, fer one," was called out.

"Yas; an' Mister Fowley, too."

"True; and some others besides. Where is Baldy Bloome? Where is Lawyer Corker? Where is Reverend Bray? Where is—"

"Yer can't mean it?"

"You shall see. Yank, give your babies the dose that will bring them to."

With a grin Yank turned to obey. He took a small vial from a pocket, and stepping to where the insensible men lay, drew off their hoods and dropped a few drops of the contents of the vial into the mouth of each.

Waiting a few moments, then, his next proceeding was to set up a yelling at the top of his voice, as he applied some vigorous kicks to the sleeping six.

They started up, looking about them in a dazed manner, and it was a little time before they realized what had happened.

Suddenly Gold-plate George sprung to his feet with an oath, tugging at his bonds.

The others were not slow to follow his example, and soon all were up.

They stared at the crowd utterly bewildered.

And the crowd, too amazed at first to take any action, presently broke out in a loud cry against the rascals.

"What means this?" cried the marshal. "What fool trick is it, anyhow?"

Dandy Dick's Dragnet.

"Who dares to profane the law in this manner?" thundered the dazed Corker.

"Gentlemen," said Dandy Dick, "if you can't comprehend the situation, let me make it plain to you. You are arrested as the Invisible Seven. There are only six of you, but the seventh, Doctor Conrad, is safe enough."

"How utterly false," cried Rev. Bray, the greatest of hypocrites. "Surely it is only a joke, my friends. It is only a rare joke. He cannot call it anything more."

"You are going to find it a pretty severe old joke," warned Dick, grimly. "We have got you dead to rights, and there isn't a single hole that you can get out by."

"We defy you to prove it," cried Corker.

"My proof was all in before you were awakened," assured Dick. "The crowd is satisfied with it. You were drugged last night, and caught in the very act of villainy, when you were about to hang another man for me, and here you are."

"Prove it!" cried Corker. "Prove it! Prove it! The law demands proof, and that of the best."

"Here are twenty of the best men of Imperial who stand ready to swear to what they know," retorted Dick, indicating Ham Stanton and his guardsmen.

"You bet yer life!" cried Ham. "It ar' all up with yer this hyar time, you durn skunks, you!"

And so cried the others, too. There was no chance for the rascals to escape their fate.

"You, Sinclair Fowley," Dick went on to say, "I shall hand over to Detective Steele. The rest I shall keep for myself. Prison yawns for you all, if not a worse fate."

The rascals, trapped, defeated, exposed, finally broke down and whined for mercy like the cowards they really were.

The dragnet had been too much for them. They might have made a stronger fight had they had Doctor Conrad at their head, but even he could not have held out against a man who had in so short a time become a very king of detectives, and whose name was yet destined to become the outlaws' dread and villains' terror.

Numerous robberies were traced to them; much of their ill-gotten gain was restored where it belonged, and they were eventually lodged in prison for long terms, as they richly deserved.

Before Dandy Dick went away, Ham Stanton and others pressed him so hard to return that at last he promised to do so.

After disposing of his prisoners, he accordingly paid another visit to the place that had witnessed some of his most daring work, and there he had pressed upon him the popular choice of the people for marshal of the little city—an honor he felt bound to decline, since he could not bring himself to settle down in any place.

The second choice was Ham Stanton, and he, accordingly, was elected; and thus came to realize what Dick had promised him. The "Old Guard" was again in power, and this time were likely to remain there. If villainy ever got another foothold in that camp it would not be the fault of the excellent marshal and his backers.

Detective Steele had already gone away, taking his prisoner, the young ladies with him, and it was afterward learned that the property was recovered and that one of the sisters had married the trusty as-steel detective.

Hudson, Dick's able ally, too, had gone away, and only Dick and the faithful Yank remained.

The camp could not do them enough honor, and when they finally took leave a big escort conducted them many miles on their way to other scenes.

The die was cast for Dick Darrel. Circumstances had forced him into the very front rank of detectives and crime scourges, and henceforth his mission was to run down evil-doers of every stripe.

The detective free lance—we shall hear of him again!

THE END.

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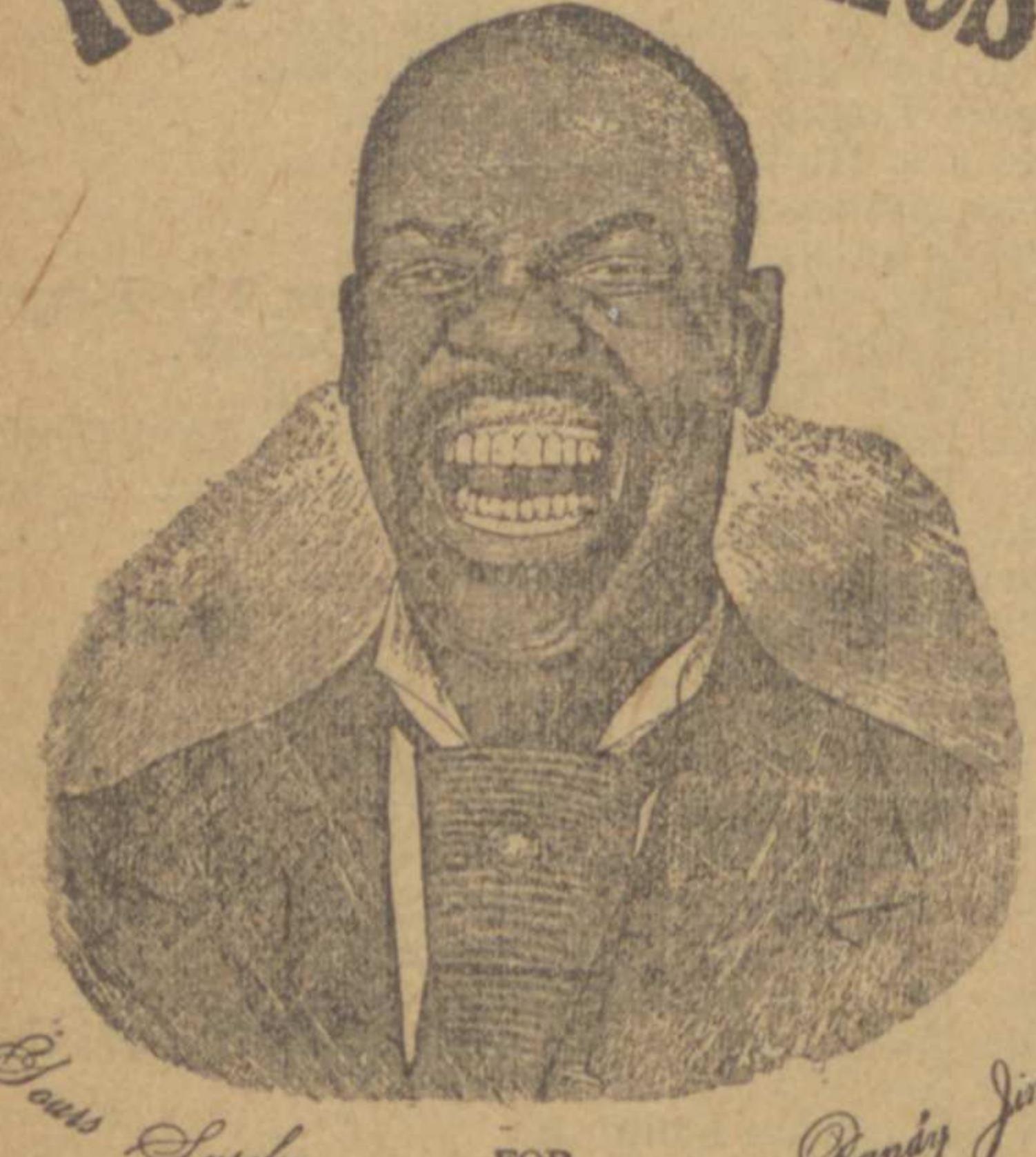
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